

“Blériot!”

Series Scriptment by
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Based Upon the True Story of History

"England is no longer an island."

- Lord Northcliffe (Alfred Harmsworth)
November 1906

"Blériot!"

NOTE: 01 to 33 are quick-cut, quasi-montage prologue bits.

01. 1865 - PARIS, FRANCE; TIME OF SECOND FRENCH EMPIRE: An outdoor meeting of the vaunted French Académie des Sciences. Magnificent hot air balloons dot the sky. A wizened scholarly man tells an audience that "lighter than air" balloon-style travel will always be the only means of flight for human beings. He backs this by pointing to a chart with a cross-section of a bird, explaining that birds stay aloft from lighter-than-air gasses which fill chambers in their bodies.

02. "Connerie!" (bullshit!) yells Nadar, who is hereby introduced via montage as he stands from the audience. It's quickly shown who he is and what he's meant to history, and how for years he bedeviled the Académie with slander and ridicule for its rigid love of the air balloon over "heavier than air" flying machines.

03. 1877: An older Nadar outside his photographic studio, with his persistent anti-Académie pamphleting and preaching. Nadar does not notice nearby the same wizened, scholarly old man who was years ago explaining bird gasses. The old man watches Nadar, angrily.

04. Nadar is approached by an assistant, who informs him of an urgent phone call. Nadar returns inside his studio, leaves his box of colorful paper pamphlets unattended. The wizened scholar walks-up cautiously, looks around. He grabs the Nadar box, moves to a railing of the nearby Seine, dumps the pamphlets over.

05. The rainbow papers fall in a storm, surrounding five-year old Louis Blériot on the passing streets below. In this Blériot jumps, grabs a pamphlet, stares in wonder at Nadar's illustrations of heavier than air winged contraptions, promised to one day replace the balloon. Blériot's family calls to him. He hides the pamphlet on his person, runs away.

06. 1892: Blériot, age 20 attends Ecole Centrale. Various scenes of his studies, his excellence at engineering, his love for building strange models, and his hidden desire to fly. Shown also is young Blériot secretly drawing heavier than air machines, hiding the drawings as an instructor passes. In the EC lunchroom, Blériot examines the pages of a L'Aeronautique magazine, hidden in his school workbook.

07. Blériot is not an exceptional student at Ecole Centrale. He struggles to keep pace. Time and again it appears he'll be released in disgrace, but he proves brilliant in metallurgy and in the engineering aspects of coal mining, railways, electricity. He climbs from his troubles, and in 1895 graduates with ECP behind his name.

08. 1896: Blériot steps from the Paris Gare du Nord train station staircase, the city spread before him. He's older, has a handlebar moustache, is dressed in military uniform.

09. Blériot takes a small apartment. Sitting alone inside, he wonders what's next for him.

10. He remembers something. He goes to one of his suitcases, pulls the ancient Nadar pamphlet, stuffed in a pocket. He sits on the floor, stares at it for a time, casually rises and tucks the pamphlet in his bag.

11. Blériot reluctantly takes an underpaid job at the Baguès electrical firm. Electricity, however, is not yet mature, and several large fires in crowded buildings prove this, including one (which we see) at the famed Comédie Française.

12. Blériot is unhappy: He knows electricity will one day answer and solve many questions, but that day is not now. While eating dinner at the venerable "Boeuf à la Mode" he ponders diagrams of innovative systems to improve upon the delivery of gas lighting, bypassing pipes and networks. He sees that something local, something self-contained, is the solution for everyone...in the rural areas as well as the cities. A fortune awaits the man who brings this resource to the masses.

13. A waiter tells Blériot he must leave: It's 10 PM and they closed an hour ago!

14. Blériot moves to a new larger apartment space, where he experiments with gasses and chemicals. In the first scene he produces only green sparks. Second scene, a glowing blue-red fire which last for a second then sputters. Third scene, explosion! He loses his moustache and eyebrows. Next scene, eyebrows and moustache partly re-grown, he's close to perfecting something. His first success is a sustained light source of intense blue-white brightness. During this scene, he checks his watch: 8:45 PM. "Café!"

15. Blériot dashes down a dark side street. There's a sound. Blériot turns and is nearly run over by a motor car. Blériot and the driver have a heated argument, with Blériot wondering what fool of a man would pilot a motor vehicle after dark, with no way to see in front of him!

16. Blériot freezes, just completely shuts-down while he's yelling at the other guy. He turns, stares at the bonnet of the guy's car, walks around it, studies it. The driver, still yelling, pulls quickly away, calls Blériot an idiot who's lost his mind.

17. The year 1900: Shot of a beautifully designed Art Deco poster, featuring the Blériot-designed "gas power" automobile headlamp. At the bustling Paris Exhibition Universelle 1900, a dapper and dashing Blériot passes his own booth, which shows his complete and impressive range of innovative auto lamps. He's with an assistant, Bimbenet, who says he overheard an American call the Blériot invention a "headlight". Both men laugh this off, and Blériot says, "We are not miners, Bimbenet!" But something's bothering Blériot. He looks a bit grim surveying his own booth. They move on.

18. Blériot and Bimbenet encounter an exhibit hidden in the back of the building, a macabre bat-wing glider called Avion III. And apparently built and displayed here by Clément Ader. The glider is quite large and intriguing. Blériot freezes in place, as he did in the alley where he was nearly run down. Bimbenet asks what's wrong. Blériot turns to Bimbenet and says, "I have been a fool. I want to take up flying."

19. Time cut: Blériot living with his mother in Paris. He adores and cares for her, but she finds him puzzling: He's doing well, has a good life, but there's no "femme" to share it with. Blériot laughs it off, says he's married to his business, but that he will *indeed* take for a wife the first woman who utterly enchants him.

20. Later in his mother's apartment, Blériot finds his Nadar pamphlet again, stored in a drawer. He takes it out, admires it. He looks up: Beyond and above the apartment window, the Brazilian chap Santos-Dumont slowly flies by, on his famous dirigible bicycle.

21. Dumont's air bike stops. A line is thrown, and down comes Dumont! He lashes the airship to Blériot's balcony railing, turns to leave and sees an amazed Blériot. Dumont tips his hat, continues, but then remembers something. "Pardon, Monsieur," he says, "But the Boeuf à la Mode...it's just below us, correct?" Blériot answers, "On the street, Monsieur Dumont, one block north, corner." Dumont thanks him, goes on his way.

22. Blériot, mind whirling, moves to a bookshelf where he removes several large volumes. We see they depict the drawings and theories of Leonardo da Vinci.

23. The next day at Boeuf à la Mode, Blériot examines da Vinci designs while lunching. Something catches his eye. He looks up, drops his fork in amazement: A man has entered with his daughter, and she's the most amazing woman Blériot has ever beheld. Blériot stands at his table in blank silence. The waiter approaches, asks what's wrong. Blériot reaches to his billfold, and without taking his eyes from the girl he gives the waiter several francs, tells him to discover what he can, as soon as possible.

24. Blériot returns to his mother's apartment, exasperated. He tells her, "I saw a young woman today. I will marry her, or I will marry no one!" His mother rolls her eyes.

25. 1901: Blériot indeed has a large wedding with Mademoiselle Alice Vedère, and we see them dash from the chapel, driving away in Blériot's motor car.

26. At their small house--and still in their wedding attire--Blériot carries Alice over the transom. He moves to the bedroom stairs, has a second thought and walks back outside. A giggling Alice wants to know where he's taking her. "To see my greatest secret, Madam Blériot."

27. Blériot, with much fumbling, opens the basement door, carries Alice below. Here is found a da Vinci-esque ornithopter machine, complete and ready to go. Its wingspan is nearly three meters. He says this strange beast will one day be the basis of all the flight in the world. And it will bear the Blériot name.

28. Alice, now on her feet, wants to see it fly. Blériot cues the battery. Flap, flap, flap. The ornithopter tries to fly, but doesn't. Alice is dumbfounded, even still. "I have married a wizard," she says.

29. An ornithopter piston seizes, wings collapse, the whole thing crashes down. After a pause, the battery explodes. Alice laughs, but Blériot does not. She tells him to get her upstairs immediately, and jumps back into his arms.

30. Days later, Blériot has reassembled the ornithopter in the yard behind the house. Alice is here, excitedly watching as Blériot prepares the battery wires. Even in the sunlight, the ornithopter looks gothic and frightening.

31. Blériot activates the battery. The ornithopter vibrates a little, then explodes.

32. Blériot, disgusted, swears-off his pursuit of flight. These experiments have cost a lot of money and time. It's a childish dream, and he's now a married man, with a good business. It's time to be reasonable about it. If humans are to fly, someone else will have to put them in the sky. For Louis Blériot, it's back to the headlight business and his new family, exclusively.

33. Alice says he may be acting rashly in this regard, and that she supports his decisions, regardless. No, he's firm: No more trying to fly! He'll focus on the automotive industry. That's where he belongs, it seems.

NOTE: End of quick-cut prologue; normal progress from here.

34. Forward to 1905: Blériot lives very well, enjoys the spoils of a company whose headlamps and spotlights are in use worldwide. His family has grown to several children of various youth.

35. Blériot and family vacation in the Berck-sur-Mer. Driving near the dunes in a beautiful yellow Panhard, the family is a smashing portrait of the age. Blériot says it's time to stop for photos.

36. Once out of the car, his youngest sees something: A man lying prone in the belly of a bi-plane glider, sailing over the nearby dunes at a height of perhaps 1.5 meters. And then he's gone. Blériot takes his pose of frozen epiphany.

37. Blériot comes-to, runs through the sand, climbs/crawls over a high dune to see a gathering of several men below. With no warning, the glider suddenly zooms toward him, flies but centimeters over his head. Blériot is astonished and impressed. The glider turns sharply, flies toward the group of men, lands beautifully. The pilot, Voisin, frees himself to cheers.

38. Blériot is awestruck. He scans the scene: A large trailer bears the name "Archdeacon". Blériot turns away with resolve, goes back to the motor car.

39. Blériot tells the family they're returning to Paris. He suddenly has urgent business. "This is the day," he says, "that Blériot finally accepts what he must become."

40. In Paris, Blériot appears unannounced at the Billancourt company workshop of Voisin. He bypasses personnel, appears in Voisin's presence. Mechanics nearby whisper "Blériot!" who by now is a well-known Parisian.

41. Voisin is a tall, lean figure. Dark, handsome, reserved, quietly powerful. His appearance is meticulous, as is his workshop. His presence contrasts with Blériot.

42. Blériot carries a very large and colorful bouquet of flowers, and an architectural tube under arm. Without saying a word, Blériot thrusts the flowers into Voisin's hands. Voisin looks incredulous. Blériot says, "Put these flowers in water, my good man, and keep them out for all to see: From this day forward, your workshop will be filled with the passion of Blériot!"

43. Voisin, standing with the flowers, listens as Blériot explains that he and Voisin are now in business together. Voisin is stunned, says it's an impossible arrangement, that his loyalties are to Monsieur Archdeacon, and to the Syndicat d'Aviation, and to Monsieur Surcouf, and...

44. Blériot assures Voisin that all the mentioned parties have received a considerable cache of francs to acquire Archdeacon's fledgling business. On that line, three workmen enter carrying a sign which reads "Blériot-Voisin, 4 rue de la Ferme, Paris, France".

45. Voisin takes a moment to absorb this, shows no expression whatsoever. Then a huge smile breaks on his face, and he bows. "Monsieur Blériot, it is an honor to accept this generous new partnership. I will do my best." "Of course you will," says Blériot. "We all will." They shake.

46. Without wasting a second, and as the workmen hang the new sign, Blériot explains that he wants a glider made immediately. Blériot pulls his tube and excitedly explains his modifications to Voisin's basic wing design. "We will call it the Blériot II, yes?" Voisin watches, stunned by this brilliant but eccentric outburst that's invaded his workshop.

47. Voisin briefly studies the plans Blériot's laid before him. He traces with his fingers, and then shakes his head. "No, monsieur, this will not work." He and Blériot then argue firmly but gentlemanly about particulars of the wing design. Voisin finally caves, says, "I will meet you halfway, monsieur. And I believe it will work!" Blériot, pleased, and without a word, exits.

48. As Blériot enters his Panhard on the street outside, we see in the background a rotund, bearded man sitting in a chauffeured Mercedes. He puffs a pipe, watches Blériot...who catches sight of the man. The two gentlemen exchange tips of the hat.

49. Two weeks later: At home, Alice puts the many children to bed while Blériot, drinking scotch, examines wing designs. Sketches, illustrations and even a large painting of an angelic host--upon which Blériot has drawn mechanical schematics--fill the room. It's all about *wings*.

50. Alice enters. They have an exchange, wherein Blériot assures her this new venture will succeed. She does not doubt him, and in fact expects anything he does to rear success. However, she also does not want to lose her husband to death or business. She asks him to not get eaten by this monster of his. Blériot smiles, guarantees he has no risk of dying, as he will not be piloting his machines: Voisin will.

51. At this moment he replaces his glass, and clumsily knocks-over an oil lantern. A fire begins, burning many of the designs and diagrams, but it's quickly extinguished when Blériot throws himself upon the flames. He's completely unhurt, but his shirt is ruined. At the end of it all, he and Alice laugh. Blériot says, "I have escaped death after all!"

52. Someone knocks at the front door. Alice: "At this hour?" Blériot, a cautious fellow, removes a hunting rifle from the wall and carries it with him to the door. He looks out a small glass window, does not recognize the young man who stands before him, lantern near his face. Blériot: "Here now! What's this intrusion?" The young man is apologetic, says that Gabriele Voisin sent him, that Voisin urgently requests Blériot's presence on the Seine river tomorrow morning, six AM, for trials of the Blériot II.

53. Blériot is suddenly aglow. The young man then says, "Monsieur Voisin also says to tell you he still feels the wings have too much camber, but he has deferred to your wishes." Blériot smiles. "Tell Monsieur Voisin that I will of course be there!"

54. Alice is concerned: "What is 'camber'?" Blériot smiles. "Wing curvature. The amount of curve, so to say."

55. Blériot puts the rifle on the desk, gently takes Alice's right arm, holds it with one hand up and out, straight. In a sensual moment, he runs his other hand down her bicep, softly causing a slight bend. "That is camber." Alice beams mischievously, they kiss.

56. 8 June 1905: Dawn, the river Seine. A small crowd has gathered at one bank. A two-man motion picture crew is here, as well. In the water we see the Blériot II tethered to an idle motorboat.

57. Blériot arrives in chauffeured Panhard car, properly dandified for the occasion. Voisin is on the Blériot II glider, checking connectors and cables.

58. Away from the main crowd, the Mercedes from days ago pulls up. The rotund, bearded man exits. Blériot asks his own chauffeur, Henri, "Who is that?" Henri, a tall, attractive man in his late 50's, does not know.

59. Voisin is ready. He sits in the Blériot II. The motorboat pulls gently forward, collects tension in the tow cable.

60. Without warning, the motorboat powers and zooms away. Voisin is caught completely off-guard. Blériot is alarmed as well, as is the crowd. "Merde," says Blériot.

61. Voisin remains calm, and in seconds the Blériot II is in the air to cheers and celebration. Immediately afterward the glider's right wing dips to the left. The wing tip catches the river and the entire Blériot II violently buries itself in the water of the Seine.

62. Submerged, Voisin struggles mightily. He's trapped by the glider's thin strapping cables, and is losing breath.

63. On the surface, the motorboat pilot has stopped engines, casually lights a cigarette and observes the goings-on.

64. Everyone waits for Voisin to emerge, but he does not. A man on the opposite bank, the foreman of a construction team working nearby, frantically jumps in a rowboat and pilots to the fallen glider. Now Blériot realizes there's trouble, as does the rest of the crowd.

65. Underwater, Voisin struggles but cannot break free. He's losing strength, when suddenly the foreman dives in beside him, and after some effort frees Voisin.

66. On the shore, the rowboat arrives with a soaking Voisin. A crowd has gathered. Alice brings a blanket, wraps Voisin. Blériot approaches, a look of fear in his eyes. "My dear partner," he says. Voisin smiles, takes a sip of hot coffee someone's provided. "See, Monsieur?", he says, "Too much camber." Blériot considers this. "Perhaps," he says. "But there is another issue."

67. On this, Blériot storms toward the motorboat captain, who is casually docking nearby. "See here!" yells Blériot. He approaches the man. "Amateur! Why did you accelerate so quickly? Are you a fool?" The captain is totally unimpressed, simply says, "Monsieur Blériot, this engine has only one speed: On. There is no control for acceleration, and I told your man as much. It is a remarkable engine, however."

68. Blériot gets his "inspired" look again. He deactivates, stares at the indeed beautiful motorboat power plant. "Who makes this engine?" he asks. The captain points to the mysterious rotund man in the limousine, who watches the Voisin/Blériot situation from afar. "That man there. He is Léon Levavasseur."

69. Blériot makes a beeline to Levavasseur. As he arrives, Levavasseur smiles vibrantly through his beard. "So, you fancy my engines, do you?" Blériot shakes Levavasseur's hand, expressionless. "Yes, we must talk."

70. Later that day, Blériot, Léon, and Voisin walk through Levavasseur's workspaces. Engines and parts of engines are everywhere. Levavasseur is a jolly, articulate man, a "nerd" for engines. Up close, he appears sloppy and distracted, but fiery nonetheless. He explains to Blériot and Voisin that he's been monitoring their efforts. Actually, the efforts of the Syndicat d'Aviation before Blériot arrived. But now it's time for Léon to do what he's always had in mind: Provide engines for heavier than air machines!

71. Blériot tells what he wants, Levavasseur says it will be no problem at all. Blériot walks away, looks around a bit on his own.

72. With Blériot gone, Levavasseur smiles and winks at Voisin. Something percolates between them, and Voisin does seem affected. Blériot returns, says, "Monsieur Levavasseur, I offer four-thousand francs for minority stake in your company. And I want an engine. Immediately." Levavasseur sees money and shakes on it.

73. Blériot is taking lunch at Boeuf à la Mode, doing a bit of light sketching at his customary table. The design is a biplane with odd cylindrical wings.

74. Outside it's a bright and sunny day but suddenly it becomes unnaturally dark. People stand from their tables to see what's going on, as does Blériot, who exits to the street where he finds Santos-Dumont lashing one of the lighter than air "bicycle ships" ships to a high lamp post. The bicycle's balloon blocks most of the sky.

75. A very dapper Santos is obviously well-known here, and Blériot watches as he speaks with several outside diners of the café. Blériot returns inside.

76. Santos-Dumont enters the café, signals to the manager with a drinking motion, as if he's taking espresso in the air. The manager nods, Santos-Dumont sits near Blériot.

77. Blériot clears his throat, "Pardon, Monsieur, but I couldn't help but notice your balloon ship outside." Dumont is a very charismatic little guy. He says, "Yes, Monsieur Blériot, but it is a thing soon forgotten." "Oh?" "Yes! Like you, I'm working on a heavier than air vehicle. I expect to master the skies before seasons change twice." Blériot is suspicious. "So, you know of my work, then?" Dumont chuckles, "Who does not know Blériot, in this business?" "Then tell me what you think of this design. Come." Santos approaches Blériot's table, looks at the double-oval winged biplane. Santos mutters, "Ohlala" under his breath, says, "Circular wings? The work of a madman. It will never fly." Not the answer Blériot had hoped for.

78. "What design do you imagine to be the proper one?" asks Blériot. Dumont says, "I base my new plane on the lines of a duck, Monsieur." "A duck? And why's that?" "Yes, Monsieur. The canard has a very secure orientation."

79. With that, Santos' coffee arrives. "It was a pleasure making your acquaintance, Monsieur Blériot. À bientôt j'espère." Santos takes his seat, lifts his cup toward Blériot who nods and then huffs to himself: "A duck!"

80. Flash forward: On the waters of Lac d'Enghien sits the Blériot III: A large bi-plane with two oval "wings". Its twin Antoinette engines roar to life. Bystanders cover their ears.

81. Voisin, in the pilot chair, quickly tries to gain control of the powered glider, which now scoots about wildly on the water. The crowds watching from shore, including Blériot, wait anxiously for the III to lift and take to the skies. But it does not. It spins in circles and dashes about until engine power is finally cut by Voisin, who throws up his hands in surrender. Blériot looks disappointed. Levavasseur, who is also here, shakes his head subtly. He eyes Blériot with a look revealing contempt. Alice sees this, in secret.

82. Later that morning in the Boeuf, Voisin and Blériot sit in silence side-by-side, at the bar. Finally, Blériot offers, "I'm convinced the circular wing is the right path. We must find a way to make it work." He and Voisin proceed to argue, Voisin becoming a bit more impatient than previous, but still very respectful. And then, silence. Blériot then agrees with Voisin on one count: The forward wing should be flat, to provide better lift. But the rounded rear assembly stays. Voisin protests, but Blériot is firm, and he wants the Blériot IV available for testing within two weeks. Can Voisin do this? Yes, he can.

83. Later, Blériot speeds along a noontime country road in his Panhard, driving goggles in place. He waves to an older couple walking along, they wave back. He continues when he spots something in the road ahead: A flailing bird. Blériot comes to a stop and goes to the bird, which is a hawk. The bird appears to have broken its wing. It eyes Blériot with much fear.

84. Blériot reaches slowly to help the hawk. It lashes-out and pecks him. The back of his wrist is punctured, Blériot pulls back in pain, stares in anger at the hawk, who stares him back. Blériot goes to the Panhard, finds a small blanket. With no hesitation or pause, he throws the cloth over the hawk, scoops it up, takes it with him.

85. Back at his house, Blériot releases the hawk from its cloth and into a cage, quickly closing the door. Alice moves in behind. They discuss the bird, who seems defiant indeed. Alice becomes silent, Blériot asks what's wrong. "I do not trust this Levavasseur, Louis." Blériot laughs, hugs her, assures that Léon is a solid and committed partner. Alice nods, asks Louis to take care, anyway. Blériot says "I'm hungry." Alice smiles. "Me, too." They leave, hand-in-hand.

86. Blériot and the hawk do not seem to have much love for one another: When Blériot approaches the cage the hawk strikes, but when Alice comes all is well. She says the bird's disposition reminds her of Léon. And then, two weeks later: "Unacceptable!" yells Levavasseur. He stands before a dapper Blériot, in Blériot's main office (where he controls the headlight business).

87. It's late afternoon, and the showroom, visible through a large glass pane, is busy with customers. Levavasseur continues. "Monsieur Blériot, it is unwise and unsafe to test my engines as you plan to! In public? For all to see? The new engines are not ready, and already you have them mounted in the Blériot IV." He points to a very nice sketch of the Blériot IV on the office wall, its two Antoinette engines clearly visible. "If something goes wrong--".

88. Blériot is puzzled by the outburst, but remains calm. He tells Levavasseur that he has complete confidence in the safety and stability of the custom engines. There is a brief discussion about Levavasseur's concern with Blériot being so involved in the finances of the Antoinette company's aeroplane engine division.

89. Blériot drops the bomb: "My dear friend, what really has you concerned is the chance that your engines will be associated with failure, yes?" Blériot diplomatically reassures Levavasseur that there will be no failure, that together the two men will change the world: Everyone will fly, and freedom from earthbound travel will at last be achieved. Levavasseur walks from the office without saying a word. He smiles and turns to Blériot, tips his hat.

90. When Levavasseur is gone, Blériot moves to the sketch of Blériot IV. He studies, grabs a drawing pen from his desk and begins filling it in: Straight, flat wings where the round one sits, on the back of the plane. After pondering a second, he dismisses the idea. "No, they must be round. Yes, round."

91. 12 November 1906: On the sprawling lawns of Bois de Boulogne, the Blériot IV makes a run. It's similar to the Blériot III, save for the front wing now squared. It's also on reinforced bicycle wheels.

92. Voisin pilots down the grass. The plane is fast and maneuvers well. But, it stays on the ground. Blériot, Alice, and their small entourage watch as Voisin turns for another pass. Alice mentions that he's driven by fully ten times with no result. "Please, Louis, let him park the machine. Don't torment yourself with this failure." Blériot has a sour look.

93. In the monoplane, Voisin attempts to steer the machine to the right, but something sticks. He curses, sees a trench ahead. Blériot and the crowd sees it, too. They watch aghast as Voisin leaps from the monoplane. The Blériot IV rattles forward, strikes the trench and is obliterated.

94. At that moment a young boy races toward the group. He yells, "Canard! Canard!" Blériot pays no mind, but then they hear it: The monstrously loud report of an Antoinette engine starting nearby.

95. Voisin runs toward them, points wildly behind. The group is beside a large hedge, and they, with Blériot in the lead, move around it to see what's going on.

96. Coming toward them, and flying six meters above the ground, is a strange looking aircraft. It's got a large box kite double-wing in the back, and a similar but smaller wing in front. It's the style of a modern airplane, but backwards.

97. The little boy again yells "Canard! Canard!" as the aircraft passes the group. At the canard controls, standing erect in a cleverly attached balloon basket, is Santos-Dumont with his trademark dapper attire. From Santos' viewpoint the scene of Blériot juxtapositioned against the destroyed Blériot IV is clear. Santos waves at the group, yells, "Monsieur Blériot! She flies!" The canard dips dangerously from Santos' free hand waving, but he quickly recovers and the canard continues, gently landing further down the lawn.

98. A huge crowd chases Dumont, among them a man with a film camera (Nadar). People randomly yell "Canard!" Blériot at first stares blankly. And then he claps, smiling with great warmth. "Bravo, Santos-Dumont! Yes, bravo!"

99. A visual duplicate of the earlier scene with Blériot and Voisin having espressos in the Boeuf: sitting side-by-side, looking straight ahead, silent. Voisin, however, appears nervous. He clears his throat, says, "Santos' flight was the best ever." Blériot nods. "Yes. But the Wright Brothers. They have flown longer."

100. Voisin fidgets, finally says, "Monsieur Blériot, I think the time has come for me to—". Blériot stops him with a motion of his hand, says, "Voisin, you and I have different paths in this life. I do not wish to hold you back. I am not a scientist, nor a purist. I am, I think, a businessman."

101. "I want to make a difference, yes. But you should not be subject to my madness." Blériot stands and extends his hand, "I release you from the partnership. I wish you the best." Voisin stands. They shake, but the handshake becomes a hug. "Marvelous Blériot!" They embrace again, Voisin says, "You will fly someday, monsieur. Perhaps farther than all of us."

102. Night: Blériot on his way home, in the Panhard. His self-branded headlights cut lovely beams into the dark. Blériot arrives at the house, is greeted by his four-year old and the Governess. Blériot asks about Alice, is told she's in the barn attending "the bird."

103. Blériot goes to the barn. Alice is here, feeding the hawk through its cage bars. The hawk appears to be in much better shape. Alice and Blériot kiss, Alice tells Blériot that it may be time to let the hawk go.

104. Blériot leans near the cage, the hawk attacks the bars. Blériot and Alice laugh. "No," says Blériot, "a bit longer." Blériot then explains that he has a new plan: He will hire the best young minds he can find, pay them a very reasonable sum, and using this collective power he'll find the design of aeroplane that will lead the world into the age of flight. Alice is concerned, wants to know who will fly these experiments. "We'll find someone," he says. They kiss. In the background, the hawk protests.

105. MONTAGE: Blériot assembling his team of young designers. The last bit of montage takes special consideration of Collin, a short and handsome 23 year-old with whom Blériot partakes of technical drawings and MOS discussion.

106. End montage with a fancy deco sign being hung outside a fine space on Boulevard Victor Hugo, at Neuilly. It reads: L. BLÉRIOT, ING. E.C.P. RECHERCHES AERONAUTIQUES. Pull back to see a super-dandied Blériot posing before the sign and having his picture taken, with an architectural tube under arm. The flash goes off, Blériot shakes the photographer's hand.

107. Blériot moves inside his new building, passes a female receptionist, and then enters the area where his hand-chosen staff awaits. Blériot moves to the centre of the room, addresses them. "We are here to bring flight to the world. To make flying as common as walking. We will succeed. I am asking all of you for the dedication and imagination to achieve this. Master Collin will be your supervisor, and Monsieur Peyret the chief engineer among you all, but I alone will have final word on all designs and specifications."

108. Blériot pulls the architectural tube, opens, shows the room a very nice schematic/mechanical drawing of...a duck.

109. "The duck will be the basis of the Blériot V. I have already briefed Master Collin and Monsieur Peyret. However, there is a policy going into effect from here forward, a policy from which I will not waiver: The test pilot for this and all aircraft to come, will be me. I alone will assume the risk." Blériot checks his watch, bids them adieu.

110. At the Boeuf, Alice waits in the same booth Blériot first saw her in, so many years ago. Blériot rushes up, apologizes for being late, is delighted that he can finally have a quiet dinner with his wife, on this important day.

111. The conversation turns: Blériot tells her he will pilot all planes coming from his new factory. They argue. Not heated, but Alice is concerned. Blériot has a family, and a business. Is it worth it risk so much? What if he should die? Blériot thinks for a moment, then says, "If I should die, then others will not." "But I am not married to others, Louis. Only you." He's not sure what to say.

112. Levavasseur, in full work clothes, puts some touches on the cylinders of a beautiful Antoinette engine. He uses a welder, which sparks. The workspace is noisy. His new engine is remarkable to behold, not simply a hunk of metal and levers but a stylish and sophisticated work of art.

113. Levavasseur carefully uses a measuring tool on one side. An assistant watches nervously. "Off by half a millimeter. It must be redone. All of it." The assistant sighs, says, "But it is such a small flaw." "Flaws are for peasants and fools. We are neither. Fix it! You will not leave til it's done."

114. There's the clapping of a single pair of hands. Levavasseur turns to see Gastambide, a distinguished older man, obviously wealthy. He says, "Léon, I applaud your attention to detail." Levavasseur's manner becomes that of compliance and servitude, a side we've not seen. "Merci, Monsieur Gastambide. How might I help you today?" Gastambide says, "*Blériot*."

115. Levavasseur and Gastambide enjoy espresso and bourbon, in Levavasseur's offices. A conversation occurs. We discover Gastambide is the secret financier of the Antoinette company, and he's become uncomfortable about the arrangement of Blériot being minority shareholder. Levavasseur agrees, but insists that Blériot is an important customer.

116. Léon explains that, due to Blériot's impulsive and altogether unscientific methods, Levavasseur can create and test new ignition and fuel delivery systems, and Blériot will be none the wiser. In the meantime, the Antoinette company will continue to overcharge Monsieur Blériot for the honor. Gastambide see the logic.

117. "But what if he's killed flying one of your engines, Léon?" Levavasseur tells him that none would blame a beautiful Antionette for Blériot's demise, as he is well know for foolishly contradicting his own designers.

118. Gastambide is not really convinced. He instructs Levavasseur to begin building and testing planes of his own. "We do not want to be left behind, Léon." "No, Monsieur Gastambide, we do not. Come with me, please."

119. Levavasseur and Gastambide enter a secret room, in the back of the workshop. It's large, protected by an immense single door. As Levavasseur slides the door aside, we see the beginnings of a stylish monoplane: Wheels, some fuselage, cabling, a fundamental rear rudder. Gastambide is most impressed. "And we shall call it the Gastambide!" says Léon. "No, keep the name Antoinette. Good day, Léon." Gastambide turns and walks away.

120. Two months later: At the Blériot household, the family climbs into the basket of a large hot air balloon. All are well dressed. Blériot himself carries an oversized picnic basket. Blériot casts off and the balloon begins to rise. From nowhere, an automobile races up. It's Collin. He exits, rushes toward the ascending balloon, yells to Blériot that canard is finally ready for testing. They can start today!

121. Blériot answers, "Today, my family and I are off to lunch. Adieu!" The balloon rises away.

122. The next day, 21 March 1907: Bois de Boulogne, morning. Collin hand cranks a push propeller and a mighty Antoinette fires. The engine rests at the rear of the Blériot V, which indeed bears the lines of duck. A group of Blériot's people are here, including Alice. At the controls is Blériot, checking, checking. Some of Blériot's crew restrain the canard from moving forward until Blériot gives a signal. And then away he goes, motoring quickly across the massive lawns.

123. The V's twin wheels buckle and the machine moves forcibly to the right. Blériot tries to control it but fails. The canard sticks itself nose first into the ground, severely damaging the front end, violently lurching Blériot forward.

124. Blériot casually unstraps and jumps from the monoplane to examine the damage. The entourage rushes up, including Alice (who walks) and Collin. There is also a young boy in traditional workman's clothes. Blériot notices him, turns back to examine his monoplane. "We will reinforce the wheels and raise the front beams to get better *attack* from the wings." The young boy industriously assists in getting the Blériot V up from its wreck. Blériot says, "Young man! What are you doing there?" Collin explains that this is his new apprentice. The boys call him "P'tit Louis." He's an orphan. Doesn't speak a word but is very proficient with tools. Blériot smiles, pats Collin's shoulder, walks away.

125. Night, at the Recherches Aeronautiques: Blériot literally burning the midnight oil with Louis Peyret as a clock nearby reads 12:17 AM. They have before them designs for a new monoplane, one very different from the canard. The word "Libellule" (Dragonfly) is clearly visible. Blériot says something about changing the directional controls, but Peyret wants to see the Blériot V in the air before he makes such a change. Blériot sighs, says, "Clément Ader may yet be correct about this warping of the wings." Blériot nods.

126. Voisin hears Blériot's chauffeured car arrive. Voisin goes to the window, sees the Panhard outside...but someone else is with Henri tonight. Yes, it's Alice. Voisin's face tightens with dread. On this, the door to the studio quietly opens, Alice enters. Blériot detects her presence, he turns. A smile, but then worry: Is something amiss? Why is she here?

127. Alice asks Blériot to come home. She walks to him, gently pulls him away from the drawings, sees him out the door. She allows Blériot to leave, turns to Peyret and says calmly, "So it is you who has taken my husband?" Alice sighs. "Aviation is his mistress. Everything he earns he spends on her. Bon soir, Monsieur."

128. 26 March 1907: Back on the Bois de Boulogne lawns. Blériot sits at the controls of the canard. The Antoinette is fired by Collin, the monoplane speeds down the grass...only to immediately suffer the breaking of the wheel forks, and a crash like before. Again Blériot sits unfazed, says, "We will change something and try again."

129. 2 April 1907: Sitting now with three wheels instead of two, the Blériot V speeds down the lawn. Suddenly the front elevator rises wildly from the grass, tipping the whole monoplane backward. The propeller smashes into the ground, hopelessly knocked crooked. The engine stops. As Blériot steps out, the plane settles and he falls to the ground. "We shall change something and try again."

130. 5 April 1907: Blériot fires the Antoinette engine, Collin yells to mind the headwind as it's strong today! Blériot waves and down the lawn he goes. All is well. Speed increases. 50 meters covered. 100. To the amazement of all the Blériot V rises slightly from the lawn, travels briefly in the air under full control.

131. Blériot feels the change from ground to air and is fine at first, but a huge gust causes him to wrestle with the rudder. He reflexively kills the engine.

132. The Blériot V drops from its flight, slams the ground. The wheels collapse and the monoplane crashes, sliding to a stop. It's mostly intact save for minor wing damage. The entourage rush up, ecstatic. P'tit Louis begins the repairs. Blériot brushes himself with no expression. "Close, now."

133. 15 April 1907: The Blériot V speeds around the lawns, intermittently rears like a horse, then hits the ground hard. It bounces, rears, bounces. Collin waves in disgust.

134. 17 April 1907: At the canard controls, Blériot checks knobs and levers. Collin smokes a cigarette, looks the monoplane over, particularly examines the propeller which is markedly larger than before. The monoplane's rear fin has also been removed. Collin tells Blériot he's nervous about the lack of fin, especially with a larger propeller. He bids Blériot take it easy on the elevator controls. Blériot only smiles, continues with his preflight.

135. Alice looks worried. She approaches Collin and whispers to him, "Master Collin, I love my husband, and I believe in him completely, but I wonder if he has tricked himself. What do you think?" Collin smiles, "Madam, in matters of flight we are all novices. Your husband, however, is quickly becoming the most experienced pilot in the world. Soon the Wright Brothers will run in fear."

136. Alice is taken aback by this, coming from Collin who casually smokes his cigarette and does not make eye contact. "Monsieur, do you mock me?" Collin freezes, stutters. "No, Madame. I am completely serious. There are few men as well-acquainted with flying as Monsieur Blériot. It won't be long before he's teaching the rest of us." Alice smiles.

137. Blériot waves, Collin walks over and swings the push-propeller. The Antoinette fires, and the canard shoots down the lawn. It's moving much faster and straighter than before.

138. Blériot smiles. The canard then lifts gently from the lawn. Millimeters only, but it's in the air. The entourage cheers, but then the monoplane unexpectedly points itself dramatically skyward. Blériot slams the control stick, the aircraft nosedives at speed, hits the ground, somersaults end-over-end and is destroyed.

139. Everyone runs to assist. Alice is paralyzed in place. She's prepared to hear that Blériot is dead.

140. Collin is first to the wreckage, and is greeted by Blériot, who stands behind the folded fuselage, hand on chin! Collin is shocked, but pleasantly so.

141. Blériot sees him, says, "Let's move to the next design." Collin is astonished with Blériot's surviving the catastrophic wreck, completely unhurt. Collin examines the engine struts directly behind the cockpit. The only piece of wood intact is the one which holds the engine. He says Blériot should be crushed dead: "That the brace on the engine held proves that God is himself with you."

142. "God," says Blériot, "is in every good design. We must find the way to make him present in all areas, not just the engine bracing." Blériot walks away.

143. Night, a fancy salon where elite smoke cigars and drink cognac. Blériot is here, in full-on business form. He sits with three other men, clients of his, and there's brief discussion about deliveries of new headlamps and spotlight. After some joking, one man is concerned that Blériot no longer cares for his lighting business, and instead is obsessed with flying.

144. Will this effect his output and productivity? They want to know. Blériot tells them his "passion for the problems of aviation" will not interfere with the lucrative automobile lighting, and in fact he has a new product on the way. One man, meaning well, says he's heard rumors that Blériot is draining the company's assets in pursuit of "a flying dream". Blériot insists all is well, distracts the men with another cognac and by changing the subject.

145. Day, the Blériot home: Children run and play, Alice prepares an afternoon meal. She calls for Blériot, cannot find him. Blériot is in the barn attending the hawk, who seems quite a bit better than before. He still snaps, however. A couple of Blériot's children fool about in the background, mimicking airplanes. Alice approaches. Blériot says it's time for the hawk to go: He's healed.

146. Outside near the house, with children in the background, Blériot and Alice try to release the hawk from its cage. They wait and watch, but the hawk only comes to the cage door, peeks around, returns deeper into the cage.

147. Later that day, at the Blériot aircraft studio: In the workroom is the near-finished Blériot VI, an aeroplane with a long and slender fuselage and two pairs of identical flat wings, one pair in front, one in back. "VI Libellule" is written on the side. Collin is here, testing the "elevons" at the tips of the forward wings. P'tit Louis assembles undercarriage struts.

148. Blériot enters, dapper and upbeat. He runs his hands over the dragonfly, then regards the Antoinette engine, which is only partially assembled in the nose of the plane, and without a propeller. Blériot thinks for a moment. "Collin," he says, "Do you think twenty-four horsepower is quite enough? Perhaps we need more." Collin reminds Blériot that The Dragonfly has not even been moved nor flown. Who can say right now? Blériot wants to know when the plane will be ready. "Levavasseur is delaying the engine for some reason." "Is that so?" says Blériot, and away he goes.

149. In his chauffeured Panhard, Blériot arrives outside Levavasseur's offices. He tells Henri to go have a coffee.

150. Inside, Blériot and Levavasseur argue about the engine delivery. Blériot wants to know why it's delayed. Levavasseur insists he has many projects to complete. It won't be long.

151. Blériot is not happy, says, "I want another engine built immediately. A fifty horsepower engine, probably ten or twelve cylinders, perhaps more." Levavasseur suddenly sees money, and is now responsive. "Yes, it can be done." Blériot says it must fit in the same form-factor as that of the current dragonfly model.

152. Levavasseur thinks it impossible, but he will work his magic right away. Blériot wants a time on the 8-cylinder engine. Levavasseur laughs, says it can be ready tonight. Blériot is not amused, says if he did not know better, it would appear Levavasseur is stalling by design. Levavasseur gets angry. Blériot is unfazed, asks if Levavasseur is assisting a competitor. Levavasseur, exasperated and insulted, tells him that Blériot knows everyone for whom the Antoinette company works: Santos-Dumont, Voisin, Blériot. Seeming satisfied, Blériot dismisses himself.

153. Levavasseur is concerned. He moves to a telephone, makes a call. "I would like to speak with General André."

154. Outside the French Ministry of Defense, Levavasseur makes way to the main entrance. He's allowed access, traverses austere halls. He's escorted into General André's office. The General looks out a window, cup of tea in hand. Levavasseur seats himself near the General's desk. "What do you want, Léon?" says André. The General doesn't turn, just keeps looking outside. Levavasseur is animated and friendly, says he has come again to ask for financial assistance, that he is close to a breakthrough on his aircraft and that General André is still welcome to a share of the company, once orders from the French government are secure.

155. General André sips his tea, says, "Blériot's new monoplane: I hear it's shaped like a duck?" Levavasseur laughs, confirms it. "But his plane flies while yours sits in a shed." Levavasseur insists that the canard only hops. It does not fly. Blériot's new number VI plane--the dragonfly--will fare no better. "Yes, Léon, but how long before he discovers the secret? Perhaps it should be Blériot I'm talking to." Levavasseur is adamant that his own design is the best, and that he will prevail. He needs just a small financial boost, and access to the military testing grounds he used years ago.

156. André is intrigued. "Why are you not asking Gastambide for assistance? Well, I probably do not want to know." André turns, walks to an original Rose Period Picasso hanging nearby. He moves the painting aside, reveals a wall safe. The General opens, pulls a stack of francs, comes and sits at his desk, facing Levavasseur. André tosses the bundled francs in front of Léon.

157. "That will hold you." Levavasseur takes the money, bows his head in thanks. André says, "We will need this 'air advantage' in the coming years, I'm afraid. I like you, Léon. Very much in fact. But if you do not deliver something soon, Blériot will be the next in line. At which time I shall of course want your immediate repayment. Good day." Levavasseur thanks the General, exits.

158. Blériot and Voisin, again in their side-by-side espresso mode. Voisin tells Blériot he's gone into business with his brother, that they call themselves Appareils d'Aviation Les Frères Voisin. Farman is their first pilot and customer.

159. Blériot smiles, asks how it's going. Voisin reports it's good so far, that he's focused on a biplane design. Blériot is intrigued, but insists the monoplane is the way to go. Voisin smiles, says, "Perhaps," and they both look at each other, face-on, then have a good laugh.

160. Issy les Moulineaux, 7 July 1907: The hand-cranked propeller of the Blériot VI spins the Antoinette engine to ignition. The entire Blériot entourage is here, including Levavasseur who watches with arms folded. Blériot in the cockpit, the dragonfly is released and away it goes. It rapidly moves down the grass, tries mightily to fly but does not. Blériot cuts the engine, shakes his head in defeat. Collin runs up, asks if there's some problem. Blériot says, "Of course there is!" Blériot climbs from the plane, hands Collin his goggles and walks away. A few feet away he stops, then turns and says. "Lengthen the wings a bit. I'll attend the rest."

161. Blériot in his headlamp offices, doing paperwork. His telephone rings. It's Voisin, asking that Blériot attend a test flight of his Farman biplane. Blériot of course agrees. On this, a secretary enters, escorting one of the men with whom Blériot was drinking cognac a few nights ago. The man is greeted, seats himself. He tells Blériot that he must seek an alternate source of headlamps. He's nervous about Blériot's not attending business as he did in the past: Orders are falling behind while demand is up. This is not acceptable.

162. Blériot assures him the situation is temporary. In fact, he says, the situation is over as of this meeting. Blériot stands and shakes the man's hand, tells him not to worry. The man seems unconvinced, turns to leave and says, "Louis, you have a wonderful thing here. On the ground. Leave the air to dreamers, yes?"

163. 11 July 1907: With the usual entourage gathered round, Blériot gives the signal and Collin cranks the dragonfly to life. The wings of this Blériot VI are indeed a bit larger now. Away goes Blériot, quickly accelerating. There's a small change in the pitch of the engine. Alice puts her hand to her mouth in shock, and the rest of the crowd is equally stunned, because...

164. The front wheels of the Blériot VI lift gently from the ground. Then goes the single rear wheel, and the entire dragonfly is in the air, flying steady. Cheers and howls and hats flying.

165. In the cockpit, Blériot is calm as stone. He observes, controls, loosely experiments. He adjusts a bit, and the Dragonfly climbs to 3.6 meters, flying nicely. A smile grows beneath his walrus moustache, but then he see before him a large group of people enjoying picnic.

166. He simply cuts the engine: The Blériot VI lands very hard, yet safely. Wheels are broken and dragging, but the plane is otherwise intact. Blériot's entourage arrives, and there is much celebration. Alice kisses him on the cheek and playfully musses his helmet. Amid the chaos of happiness, Blériot can only stare into his wife's eyes, tears welling with pride.

167. A copy of L'Aerophile plops-down on a desk, pages open, zoom to an article about Blériot. Narration reads over subtitles, "The first decisive success rewards the ingenious and tenacious efforts of the learned engineer Blériot, whose rare merit thus shines out before the eyes of all."

168. Blériot visits Levavasseur's factory. The new engine is not yet ready, but close. Blériot has a look at it: Sixteen cylinders, an estimated horsepower of fifty. Blériot is pleased, and wants to talk about investing more heavily in the Antoinette company, both for the benefit of himself and for others in the field. Including his competitors. Levavasseur is angry and passionate about not going farther together than they already have. Blériot does not press, and simply asks him to consider it. Blériot leaves, Levavasseur is conflicted.

169. Blériot, having lunch at the Boeuf. Two reporters approach, one of them English-speaking from Britain's "The Daily Mail". The other is French, from "Le Petit Parisian". At first Blériot is offended that they've interrupted his meal, but in their somewhat comedic and chaotic exchange (Blériot does not speak English) they basically question Blériot on how soon the world can expect him to compete? For example, the huge prize offered for the first cross country flight in a heavier than air vehicle. As the French reporter translates, Blériot says he considers flying for prizes to be the work of fools. The reporter says the Wright Brothers seem to feel the same. Blériot remarks that the Wrights know the air very well, and if they will not fly for prizes, then good for them.

170. The reporter says he hears the Wrights will not compete because their airplane is inferior. "Inferior to what?" says Blériot, perturbed. "The Wrights have not perfected their aeroplanes, this is true, but they currently lead the way. Absolutely. If competition moves the science of flying forward, I would then be happy to behave foolishly." The men make note, Blériot asks if he may now eat.

171. In his Panhard, Blériot arrives at a sporting field which has been emptied for Voisin's use. Farman and the Voisin brothers are here...and Levavasseur. The Voisin biplane is being prepared, a sparse but elegant machine.

172. But Farman is alone with the plane while the others are several meters away, in discussion. Blériot moves up, studies the Voisin biplane design. Farman recognizes him, says, "Monsieur Blériot!" Farman rushes over. He's a good-looking, energetic, athletic young man with trimmed beard and moustache. He congratulates Blériot on his amazing flight with the dragonfly. Farman and Blériot discuss piloting issues as the others approach, ready for the day.

173. Time to go. The engine cranks over, and Farman zips away, pulling easily into the skies. The Voisin biplane is quite solid and stable, though perhaps underpowered. Farman lands downfield, Blériot turns to Voisin and smiles.

174. "You will no doubt succeed with this biplane, Gabriel. Farman is a good man, as well. It will be a pleasure to try and outmaneuver you in the coming weeks! That is, if Léon here has my new engine." Levavasseur chuckles, puts an arm around Blériot, says, "You know, the papers are calling monsieur Blériot 'The Prince of Bad Luck'." The group explodes in laughter, and Blériot thinks it funny too, but says he must be off. He shakes hands all round, makes his exit. Voisin smiles. "Marvelous Blériot."

175. Late at night in the Blériot household. Blériot is asleep at his desk, on top of schematics showing cockpit layout and fanciful placement of gauges. Alice enters, walks over and brushes his hair with her hands. He doesn't wake at first, but then she tugs his moustache, and his eyes open. She wants him to release the hawk. Why not try at night? And then come to bed.

176. Outside, hawk cage open, Blériot and Alice watch the hawk watching them. The hawk is having nothing to do with anything outside his home. It squeaks at them a couple times.

177. Blériot arrives at his office in the Panhard, the hawk in its cage is with him. Blériot enters the office and tells his receptionist to try and coax the wretched hawk. He leaves it with her, goes to the workshop.

178. Blériot and Collin watch as P'tit Louis adjusts a new control system for the Blériot VI: a sliding seat, like an oarsman's. The elevons have been locked. Blériot thinks this change will allow greater control and stability. He climbs in and tries the sliding cockpit. "Let's go fly," he says.

179. Blériot leaves the ground in the dragonfly. He makes a sliding cockpit adjustment, the craft moves easily and calmly to a height of about 7.3 meters. He's noticeably impressed, until he hears a strange CLICK, sees one side of the metal propeller has shifted, now producing no thrust. The aircraft cants side-to-side. Blériot tries to control it, but the vehicle makes a bad and very rough landing, crushing the undercarriage completely. He, however, walks away unscathed. He checks the prop. "I want this replaced. In fact, I want many things replaced. And I want more power. I will not fly again until we have the new engine." Blériot walks away, his goggles still on.

180. The streets of Paris, night: Excitement as a crowd gathers round a workman who's hanging posters. People leave stores and join the throng. The posters read: DEUTSCHE-ARCHDEACON PRIZE OF 50,000 FRANCS TO THE FIRST INDIVIDUAL WHO FLIES A HEAVIER THAN AIR DEVICE IN A COMPLETE UNBROKEN CIRCLE. Voisin is among those peering. He rushes off.

181. Blériot, an hour later, poring over designs for the Blériot VII. Alice approaches, sits quietly near him. He smiles at her, continues his work.

182. But then he stops. "We are running out of money," he says. Like a woman on a train she cannot stop, she accepts his words but with a definite lump in her throat. "I will do what I can to help," she replies, "I still have my dowry." Blériot is aghast at the idea of using her money.

183. Alice only smiles, asks him to come to bed. This time, he extinguishes the lamp and does so.

184. Morning: Blériot arrives at his office to see Léon delivering the new engine. It's a Levavasseur work of art. Sixteen cylinders, highly compact. Blériot marvels at the workmanship. "Truly, there is no one like you, Léon. We will test it immediately."

185. Blériot runs to the reception area. The hawk is still here, in its cage. He asks about it, the receptionist says the hawk refuses to move, so she's been feeding and watering it. Blériot instructs her to call Farman, Voisin, Robert Esnault-Pelterie, Ferber, his wife. They will test the plane tomorrow morning. Blériot is electrified, says the 50,000 franc prize is all but won.

186. 17 September 1907: On the field at Issy les Moulineaux: Blériot's large group is here, with the hawk in its cage. The new Blériot model has changed a lot: four-blade propeller now, a different rudder, and, of course, the Antoinette 16. Robert Esnault-Pelterie greets Blériot, says if he ever needs an engine, he'd be happy to supply one. Blériot reminds him, in a friendly manner, that he's firmly an Antoinette man.

187. The time has come. Everyone wishes Blériot well. Collin prepares to crank the propeller. At the last moment, Alice has a look of shock on her face. She runs up to Blériot, who's now in the cockpit. She tells him to be especially careful on this run. Blériot assures her all will be well. They kiss, she runs back.

188. Collin cranks it, the Antoinette 16 bellows with a racket to surpass anything thus far. Blériot winces. The crew releases the craft. Blériot bolts away, faster and more violently than before.

189. Within seconds he's in the air. He cruises along, adjusts the controls. Immediately he climbs to a height of more than 30 meters. He's looking all around, and the ground entourage is flatly astounded. Blériot levels-off, then does a small climb again, but the engine stops, completely. He tries to restart, nothing happens.

190. Thirty-three meters above the lawn, the Blériot VI turns downward and begins a spiral nosedive. Death is certain at this height. Blériot freezes for a moment. Thinking quickly, he climbs from the cockpit, crawls toward the back of the plane. The Dragonfly responds to the shift of weight, and the plane levels somewhat, gliding more reasonably to the ground.

191. Blériot, seeing disaster, spread-eagles his legs across a strut. The plane touches ground, and a spectacular crash results. Everyone comes running, and expects the worst. It's the most serious accident yet.

192. But Blériot simply steps from the wreckage, his goggles shattered but otherwise completely intact. He's covered in red liquid, which at first seems to be blood. Alice is mortified, but Blériot assures her it's fluid from the engine, nothing more.

193. In the middle of this, Robert Esnault-Pelterie walks up with a notepad. He's adding and subtracting. "Well, Monsieur Blériot, it appears you have flown approximately 183 meters and were in the air a full seventeen seconds." Blériot says he doesn't know. Esnault then replies, "That's the best performance this year in Europe. You will win the Aéro Club prize, for sure." There are cheers and shouts. Collin, smoking a cigarette, remarks that the dragonfly is a loss, and that they'll now have to get the VII ready more quickly. Blériot just wants to have a breakfast with his wife.

194. Close on Aéro Club newspaper, with its article awarding Blériot the special medal and prize for the longest flight in Europe, 1907. The headline reads, BLÉRIOT LEADS THE WAY IN AVIATION. The subhead reads, WHO CAN STAND AGAINST BLÉRIOT?

195. 5 October 1908: Alice arrives at the parade grounds of the Issy, driven there by Voisin. Blériot and his entourage stand around a foldable picnic table, which is 15 meters or so from an aeroplane that for some reason is under a large sheet. Blériot approaches Alice, sits her at the picnic table, which is furnished with all manner of tasty breakfast and coffee items. She's surprised, wants to know what Blériot has done wrong that he needs her forgiveness, beside staying out all night in his workshop.

196. Blériot says he wants Alice to be the first "civilian" (as he says) to see the Blériot VII. The men remove the sheet from the new monoplane. Blériot trips and falls in the process. The new craft is a marvel: Sleek, snow-white, immaculate. It's a monoplane, but on a much higher order than the dragonfly.

197. Blériot explains he's created a new control system, and finally the instrument package he's always wanted. The trials now begin. Blériot runs to the VII, jumps into the cockpit. Collin and Mamet check things one last time, as does Blériot.

198. Voisin is near Alice. She smiles at him with a friendly "You see?" written all over her. Voisin nods, walks to the plane, looks it over. He's impressed, especially with the new rudder linkage, and says as much. Blériot thanks Voisin for bringing Alice, wants to know when Voisin's new plane will fly. "It's flying right now." He points. Indeed, far off is a small black dot in the sky, perhaps 12 meters from the ground, moving slowly. "Farman?" asks Blériot. Voisin nods. "He's been flying regularly now. Short flights. Getting used to the thing." Blériot has a worried look, but smiles warmly. "That is good to hear. Send my best."

199. Blériot instructs Collin to turn the propeller, which is now a four-blade metal creation. The Antoinette yells and the VII wants to run, but Blériot's men restrain it. Voisin steps back, Blériot waves, and away he goes.

200. The VII zips down the parade grounds. In large zigzags, Blériot moves at unprecedented speed. But he does not fly.

201. At the picnic table, Alice asks Voisin why Blériot does not fly. Voisin says Blériot told him earlier that until he'd mastered his "new steed" on the ground, he would not enter the air.

202. In the background, as if on cue, the Blériot VII takes to the air, then slams down hard: The left wheel buckles, the prop hits the ground, the engine stops.

203. As Voisin and Alice watch this foible, the mechanics run to Blériot, who passionately points to the undercarriage. He motions and wildly gesticulates, pointing at struts, cables, and the wheels themselves. Blériot says something to Collin, who then turns and runs to the picnic table. Voisin asks what Blériot is on about, he says that Monsieur Blériot has just redesigned the entire undercarriage standard for his airplanes. "Only just now?" says Voisin. Collin nods, pours a water. "And, Monsieur is very thirsty." Collin walks back toward Blériot with the water glass.

204. 6 December 1907: Blériot VII in the air at Issy, moving perfect and assured. It flies past Collin, who holds a stopwatch. British reporter P.Y. Alexander is also here, taking notes. SUBTITLES: 488 meters travelled, at 80 KPH. TIME CUT: Another flyby: Collin clicks the watch, his brows raise. SUBTITLES: 500 meters, 83 KPH. Alexander remarks that Blériot has achieved the fastest flight speed in history.

205. If that weren't enough, Blériot surprises everyone with a beautiful U-turn in mid air. The astonishment at this move, never before seen, is hastily written by the reporter. Blériot approaches for landing at higher than normal speed. The left wheel collapses as he touches ground. The VII's left wing catches dirt, and the entire aircraft cartwheels violently forward, landing upside-down and spinning to a stop. The VII is thus destroyed.

206. Everyone runs over, knowing that Blériot is almost certainly dead or very seriously injured. Per usual, Blériot emerges from under the mess, brushing himself. He declares the trials of the VII finished. Alexander yells, "Valiant sportsman!" Everyone claps. Blériot smiles, and on that the glass from his left goggle lens falls to the ground.

207. A motorcar pulls up to the small group, stops at speed. The driver rushes over to Alexander, speaks to him excitedly. Alexander looks completely stunned. He smiles, yells, "Farman's done it! He's won the 50,000 francs!" Blériot goes white. Collin says, "So, Farman flew the first circle? Big deal." "No," says Blériot, "It's a great moment." Blériot solemnly applauds Farman, and the others follow.

208. L'Aeronautique headline, January 1908: FARMAN OVERTAKES BLÉRIOT, WINS 50,000 FRANC DEUTSCH-ARCHDEACON!

209. Blériot and Alice, at home, silently prep for a night at the theatre. As Blériot struggles with his bowtie, Alice closes the door. She's concerned. Blériot is spending no time at home with the children, and much less with her. She must know when Blériot plans to stop his conquest. At what point will enough be enough? She insists she wants him to succeed, especially now. But what is the price, Louis? Blériot does not respond, but he's visibly moved.

210. That night, at The Comédie Française theatre (same that had previously burned down): Black-tie event. Blériot enters with Alice, takes reserved seats near the front. Farman enters after, and there's a big commotion with cheers. Farman is gracious, takes his seat alone, near Blériot, but across the aisle.

211. The show starts with a bit of comedy, "A Drama of the Air, Starring Monsieurs Farman and Blériot. It's a gag thing, with a guy who looks like a Blériot caricature "flying" in a wooden box on ropes and labeled "Blériot the Canard". The box constantly falls to the stage floor, with the chorus yelling on about "Poor Blériot! The man who always falls!" The crowd roars in laughter. Blériot takes it very well, but Alice is noticeably perturbed.

212. From the stage rafters comes another wooden crate in a sleek echo of the Voisin biplane and labeled "Farman the Master." The chorus cries, "And then we have Farman, who never falls and always stays true! Hail the hero Farman!" The audience cheers.

213. But Farman is none too happy. He walks out in disgust. Blériot watches him go, the audience falls silent. Blériot tells Alice he'll be right back. Blériot follows Farman out.

214. In the lobby, Farman prepares to light a cigarette. Blériot appears in the background, yells, "Wait!" He approaches Farman and produces a pair of cigars. Blériot lights the cigars for both men. They smoke. Farman complains about the disrespect the people of France are showing Blériot. But Blériot shrugs. "They are correct. I always fall." Farman smiles. "So would I, Blériot, were I as brave a man as you." Farman explains that he himself never flies unless he's absolutely sure there will be no failure. "You're a greater man than I, Blériot." Blériot will have nothing of it. A moment of silence.

215. Farman asks what's next? Blériot says the only chance he sees to stay in the game of the aeroplane is to be the first man to fly cross country. He's planning a major flight, which will be observed by the Académie des Sciences. He has a new plane which is looking to be very stable, indeed. Farman is quiet, then laughs. Blériot asks what's the matter. Farman is going for the very same record. They both laugh, puff their cigars. Blériot smiles warmly, says it will be a pleasure to compete with such a good friend.

216. The Blériot VIII, in flight. SUBTITLES: JUNE 1908 - THE BLÉRIOT VIII TEST FLIGHT NUMBER 10. Stable, solid, beautiful. Similar in looks to the VII. Blériot pilots the machine with ease and agility, flying high over farms and trees.

217. Blériot lands the VIII near his entourage. The hawk cage is here today. Blériot exits the plane, Collin is here. Blériot declares the VIII to be the best yet. He walks to a small table of maps and charts. His men gather round as he explains that scouting has made the course clear: Start in Toury, fly over Dambron, make a U-turn, head for Santilly, then onward back to Toury.

218. No more parade grounds, no more controlled environments: If humanity is to fly, Blériot must fly for a purpose, not show. He must visit Levavasseur to check on the new engine.

219. At the Issy grounds, Levavasseur is here with the Welferinger brothers and the rest of the helpers. A large group, not at all like Blériot's sparse accompaniment. One of the Welferingers sit in Levavasseur's monoplane, which is a marvel: Large, angular, sophisticated, tidy. Its mighty Antoinette engine barks loudly. The men look the plane over.

220. Blériot pulls near the group, exits his car and makes a beeline for Levavasseur. Over the roar of the engine, he and Levavasseur argue. Blériot can't believe the man is directly competing against him, which in effect means Blériot is competing against himself. Levavasseur counters that he's free to do as he wants, and besides, this new plane is not flying yet as it's not ready. Blériot is clearly upset at not being told about the secret project. "I feel that you've used me for many things, Léon, but I still own part of the Antoinette company and I intend to seek a solution." Blériot leaves, but then stops and returns. "Oh, yes: Your aircraft is magnificent." Blériot shakes Levavasseur's hand, walks away. Levavasseur carefully watches him go.

221. Blériot enters his workshop, hawk cage in hand. He moves to his office, doesn't say a word and is obviously concerned. Collin goes and confronts him. Blériot explains the Levavasseur affair. Collin makes a throat-cutting gesture, uses profanity. Blériot is at a loss, however: What will they do without Antoinette engines? Collin suggests REP power plants, but Blériot is unsure, and resistant: Money is running out and the clock is ticking.

222. Blériot dismisses Collin, says for him to go and to send the others home. Blériot is also going home, to his wife and children, for once. "We will succeed, Collin. But not today."

223. Blériot household: Louis reads a story to his children, who sit enraptured. Alice serves coffee, sits down afterward. One by one the kids go to sleep. Comical. Blériot puts down the book, smiles at Alice. They have a frank conversation about ambition, love, and the desire to improve human affairs. Blériot thinks himself perhaps a fool. Alice insists it's men of his kind who make things better for all. Blériot only smiles. They sit together, a family, in silence.

224. 08 October 1908: Daytime. Blériot sits in his cluttered offices, going over paperwork. Mamet enters with a copy of the British Daily Mail newspaper. He shows Blériot an ad: £500 FOR THE FIRST PERSON TO FLY BY AEROPLANE OVER THE CHANNEL BETWEEN FRANCE AND ENGLAND - TO BE PAID UPON OFFICIAL CONFIRMATION. Blériot scoffs, as does Mamet. Mamet says it's ridiculous to even consider such a flight at this stage in history. Lord Northcliffe, the owner of the paper, must only have publicity in mind. A stunt! And besides, a balloon with a basket was flown across the English Channel in 1785!

225. Blériot chuckles, as do others. No comparing a mere balloon to a flying vehicle. Like ants and oranges! Blériot: "The channel. It would be an incredible feat." Mamet: "Not even the Wrights would dare." Blériot considers, Mamet chuckles. "And right now, we ourselves would do well to stay in the air longer than ten minutes!"

226. SUBTITLES: MONACO. A motorboat race on the water, heavily attended. Gastambide watches via binoculars. Action is incredible, with one boat in particular easily taking the lead and winning to huge cheers. The boat comes to dock, and out steps an attractive athletic man in his 30's. His name is Hubert Latham. He's swarmed by press and well-wishers.

227. Latham sees Gastambide in the crowd, politely excuses himself. He walks to him, shakes his hand. Gastambide is impressed by Latham's boating achievement. "Five wins in a row. Unheard of."

228. Latham shrugs, lights a cigarette. The two discuss Levavasseur's new plane. Latham practically begs Gastambide to let him fly it. Gastambide assures it will happen: He needs a man like Latham to do the English Channel before anyone else. The man who crosses first will live forever, and his aeroplane will be the one the world buys above all others, including the planes of the Wrights.

229. Latham grabs Gastambide's arms and with huge smile, swears that he will be the man to cross. But he must first attend some business in Cairo. Not a problem, says Gastambide: The aeroplane is still being tested, and will be ready by Christmas. Latham says he'll also be ready.

230. 29 October 1908: Blériot, Alice, Voisin, Collin, Mamet: dinner. They discuss the channel crossing offer from Daily Mail. Mamet says to watch Levavasseur, that this is just the kind of thing he would want. Blériot's not so sure, since the Antoinette has not yet flown. Voisin says it actually *has* flown. Blériot is stunned. Yes, one of the Welferingers has twice taken it up. It flies well, from accounts.

231. Blériot is upset. He toasts the flights tomorrow he and Farman will attempt, first cross country journeys in history.

232. He toasts his friendly rival, Farman, and Voisin stands and toasts Blériot. After Blériot drinks he stares at his wine glass for a moment, then throws the glass into the fireplace. Alice throws her glass, as well. A stunned silence then laughter, and they all throw glasses in the fire!

233. October 31, 1908: Toury. Various reporters and a large, well-dressed crowd near the edge of town. The Blériot VIII is here, attended by Collin, Mamet, and P'tit Louis. The Panhard pulls up, out comes Blériot and Alice. An official-looking man, the mayor, rushes to greet them. The crowd cheers.

234. The mayor formally thanks Blériot for starting his historic journey from Toury, and not Santilly. Laughter. Blériot hurries. He shakes the mayor's hand, dashes to his cockpit. As Blériot begins his checklist, the press quickly asks questions. A couple are mundane, but one strikes Blériot badly: "Farman is your competitor and seems more likely to succeed today. How do you feel about that, monsieur?" Blériot answers, "None of us lose in this adventure. Good day." With that, Mamet backs the people off, Blériot signals, Collin cranks the prop. The Antoinette roars. The Blériot VIII rolls to a takeoff to cries of "Bon voyage" and "Bravo!"

235. As the Blériot VIII gathers speed, Blériot pushes the tail lever forward. But something goes wrong: The monoplane rears straight up, falls violently backward and upside-down to the grass, trapping Blériot beneath. The crowd rushes like a wave. Blériot is extracted, totally unhurt. In a rare moment of anger he curses Mamet for wrongly connecting the tail rudder. Blériot checks the plane over, seems satisfied that it's okay. "A miracle," he says, and then one of the newsmen replies, "For The Prince of Bad Luck to fly without a crash...that would be a miracle!"

236. Onward, late afternoon. Blériot takes a light meal at a local Toury café. He's alone, reading the paper. A group of young boys notice him there, approach cautiously. "Monsieur Blériot?" They ask if he's ever frightened when he crashes. Blériot is confused by the question, asks why they would want to know. They say that he falls from the sky so much, he must get frightened sometimes. Blériot isn't sure what to say.

237. On this, a glum Collin and Mamet approach. Collin shoos the boys away, does not sit. They say nothing. Blériot asks what's up. Collin says, "Farman's done it: Bouy to Reims. A full twenty-seven kilometers. We're beaten, Louis. Our work here in Toury is now for nothing. Too late for us, monsieur."

238. Blériot shows no emotion. He says to send Farman congratulations. He thinks for a moment. "Tomorrow, I will do what I came here to do." Blériot goes back to reading his paper, Collin and Mamet walk away.

239. 31 October 1908: Toury, morning. A similar Blériot scene as previous, but with far less people in the crowd. The mayor is here again, looking unhopeful. Blériot, in the cockpit of the VIII, checks things over. Collin and Mamet examine the elevators and cables. P'tit Louis pulls the caulks.

240. The Antoinette makes its noise and Blériot zips off down the grass. Perfect takeoff, beautiful controlled ascent. Like the rest of the crowd, Collin and Mamet watch in silence, expecting failure. When it's clear there will be none, the crowd cheers and everybody races for their automobiles.

241. Collin, Mamet, Alice and P'tit Louis pursue Blériot in the Panhard. Seemingly half of Toury is following behind. Thus begins an exciting sequence of cars chasing Blériot, and Blériot chasing a train, via the Paris-Orléans railway. At one point the conductor of the train stops to clean his glasses in disbelief at this walrus-mustached man hanging outside his engine window. Blériot waves, and off he goes, slightly west toward Dambron.

242. In the villages of Château-Galliard and Dambron, people in their fields and homes hear the scream of the Antoinette passing over. They stare in wonder.

243. In the air, Blériot marvels at the beauty of the countryside. He's flying smoothly, no trouble. It's a moment of joy and historical import. Behind and below Blériot, the Toury crowd tries desperately to keep pace, but it's really no use: They maintain Blériot in sight, but no better.

244. Blériot makes a nice turn over some trees. The engine sputters. Blériot loses altitude but controls the situation, making a quick but dramatic turn toward an open area. The engine coughs again, the plane drops. Blériot steers toward the large lawn of a castle, the Château d'Auvilliers. He lands safely, interrupting a nearby picnic. The lunchers are, of course, stunned, even more so when they see the crowd of Toury cars approach.

245. It seems the whole world descends upon the castle lawn. Cheers and shouts are the order of the day. Collin and Blériot are less enthusiastic as they try and find the engine trouble. As the castle owner and his family watch in silence, one of the newspaper men shouts, "Average speed 85 kilometers per hour! A record! Blériot VIII is the fastest aeroplane in the world!" More cheers, but Blériot simply waves between fussing with wires, aside Collin. They discuss in whispers. Collin, smoking a cigarette, casually makes adjustments. Alice brings Blériot a canteen of water, kisses him on the cheek. He smiles, downs the drink, climbs back into the cockpit. Collin and Mamet shoo everyone away, Collin cranks the prop, the Blériot VIII comes to life, bumps down the castle lawn.

246. Blériot waves at the castle owner and his family, who still stand staring. Blériot clears the castle, and is gone.

247. Blériot in the air. All seems well. He's approaching Villiers Farm, near Santilly. Again people come from their homes and chores to see the marvel of Blériot. But yet again, engine failure! Blériot at first ignores it, but then the engine dies altogether. Blériot glides to an easy landing in the only place he can: Right in the middle of the main road!

248. Blériot jumps out, goes to the engine, fiddles. In no time, his entourage is upon him, but Blériot is already headed for the cockpit. Collin runs up, and Blériot simply tells him to crank the prop. He does, and in seconds Blériot is moving down the road. He gets the plane in the air just in time to clear an oncoming vehicle! He turns sharply east, and the chase is on once more.

249. At Toury, the crowd at the originating Blériot take off site is down to a handful. The mayor is here, under an umbrella, sitting at a table someone's brought from town, talking with a couple people. A sound is heard. They look up. It's Blériot, coming for landing. A sudden euphoria.

250. The populace of Toury have heard the awesome bellow of the Antoinette, and they now come in numbers. Blériot lands magically, and is celebrated as a hero on the spot.

251. Later, in the town square, Blériot is honored by the mayor, at a ceremony in the street that's attended by at least two hundred.

252. The mayor says, "Monsieur Blériot has demonstrated that French aeroplanes mounted on wheels--unlike the crippled planes of the Wright Brothers--are capable of resuming their flight when interrupted by, eh, circumstances. Blériot has shown us today that aero-locomotion will henceforth enter into everyday practice. Vive Blériot!" Over cheering, Blériot and the mayor shake hands, with Alice clapping and radiant.

253. HEADLINE - LE MATIN (French newspaper): Blériot and Farman triumph! HEADLINE - DAILY MAIL: Blériot/Farman: The air is owned by France! HEADLINE - NEW YORK TIMES: Blériot/Farman achievements eclipse Wright brothers.

254. Levavasseur reads the Le Matin article with displeasure. He sits in his workshop near the Antoinette monoplane upon which the Welferinger brothers work. "So, Blériot has done it? Well, chaps, no one will remember a man who flew between a couple of meaningless French villages. The Channel. *That* they will remember."

255. Blériot and his crew are back on the lawns, with the VIII. Blériot enters the plane and calls for contact.

256. The VIII speeds down the large lawn. Just as the plane is lifting away, a tire strut collapses. The VIII cartwheels wing over wing, destroyed. Blériot emerges from the rubbish, unharmed and unmarked. He surveys the damage, puts hands on hips. Collin says to Mamet, "So much for owning the air."

257. Collin and Mamet approach. Blériot looks at them, says "The VIII is finished. We move to the next of our planes at once." Collin and Mamet seem concerned. Blériot wants to know why. "There are no planes, Louis." Blériot is stunned. "What of the nine and ten?" Collin lights a cigarette, says, "The nine is still too heavy to fly, and the ten...well, even if it were finished, the ten, monsieur, was ridiculous from the start. Why would we build a very expensive four-seat airplane when we cannot even keep a single-seat reliably in the air?"

258. Blériot scowls. "Because I told you to, sir! Have the nine ready in the morning. The ten can wait." Blériot huffs away. When he's out of earshot, Mamet tells Collin that his reprimand of Blériot was very bad. It may mean their jobs.

259. "Mamet, the monsieur will soon be out of francs and we will then be out of jobs, anyway. But until then, we work. Let's go."

260. Contact! It's a misty dawn, and the Blériot IX sits on the lawns, ready for takeoff. It looks like a larger, meatier version of the VIII, save for being all white. The only ones here are the mechanics, Blériot, and P'tit Louis.

261. Blériot signals the men to release the plane, and the IX zooms away. But it does not leave the ground. Even at full throttle, the best that can be managed are small hops. Collin shakes his head.

262. Blériot tries to cut the engine of the XI, but he breaks something. The plane continues full speed, toward a bank of fog. Blériot struggles to stop the craft. A small rise appears in the fog. Blériot is about to bail, but he hits the rise, becomes airborne, crashes into the branches of an oak.

263. Collin and Mamet come running. Blériot sits in the cockpit, wedged in the branches, unhurt. But he stares forward darkly. Collin motions for he and Mamet to leave the area. They do. Blériot seems content to stay where he is.

264. November, 1908: Cover of Le Martin, bottom part of page, small story: BLÉRIOT NO LONGER FLIES. WHAT HAS HAPPENED?

265. One month later, Christmas Eve, 1908: Inside the Blériot household, Alice has all the children well-dressed and sitting near the X-Mas tree, whose base is covered with beautifully wrapped presents. They play. The housekeeper is here, as well. Little Jeannot asks, "When will papa be home?"

266. Blériot's Panhard pulls into the driveway. Cheers all around. In comes a slightly snowy Blériot. He looks glum, and must summon the energy to greet his children and hand out tiny gift boxes to each of them.

267. As the children run off to open their gifts, Alice takes Blériot's hands. She knows something is quite wrong. Blériot finally asks her to come to the salon, they must talk.

268. In the salon, Blériot closes the door for privacy. He sits before Alice, tells her they are out of money. Completely out. Alice asks what happened with the two new planes he'd built, the IX and X. "I was a fool to pursue those. I should have perfected the VIII. I have failed everyone." Alice wants to know what role Levavasseur has in this situation.

269. Blériot admits that he's been paying consistently more money for the Antoinette engines, reluctantly. He knows Léon is really just another competitor now. Tragic.

270. Alice wants him to leave Levavasseur and his Antoinette engines. "I cannot. I need those engines, even with their faults." Alice won't hear it. Blériot must move on. They argue angrily for the first time, Blériot insisting he needs the Antoinette company, Alice saying he's pig-headed, and that's why they're in this mess. Alice reminds him about the children, and loudly. On this, little Jeannot opens the door to the salon. "Someone is on the telephone for papa."

271. Blériot dashes out. On the phone is Collin. He wants Blériot to join him tomorrow morning, as they must pay a visit to the military warehouses nearby. Blériot needs to see something for himself. Blériot scoffs. "It's Christmas Day tomorrow!" Collin says, "If you want to save your company and your finances, monsieur, be there. I will have P'tit Louis come along to provide hot coffee and sweets."

272. Blériot replaces the phone, Alice approaches. They share a moment in silence. She grabs his hands. "Remember, I still have my dowry. It may help." Blériot smiles, embraces her.

273. The next day: Signs of Christmas on the buildings at the outskirts of Paris. On a snowy road, Blériot pulls his Panhard to a waiting Collin and P'tit Louis. They're in an area near a complex of guarded and fenced military warehouses. Collin instructs Blériot to join him in hiding on a hill nearby.

274. When there, Collin produces a telescope. He looks toward the gate of the complex. "Voila!" He hands Blériot the scope. Blériot sees Levavasseur's car approach the gate. He's immediately allowed in. Blériot snorts. "And what does this mean?" Collin says to watch, demands coffee from P'tit Louis.

275. Blériot follows Léon's car as it rounds the grounds and comes to an offset warehouse. Military personnel open the door of the building. Blériot cannot believe what he sees.

276. At least three of Léon's monoplanes are inside, each slightly different. All seem complete and in good shape. Collin tells Blériot that it's time to change plans or give up: Levavasseur is now the leader, he needs only the pilots to control the skies. Blériot drops the scope. "Such a fool I've been. But I will handle this affair as a gentleman."

277. Later: Blériot in his office, late afternoon, long and cold shadows. He sits at his desk, looks at the wall.

278. His desk phone rings. He looks at it quizzically. He answers. It's Léon: He drove by a few minutes ago and saw that Blériot's auto was outside. He wants to meet with Blériot immediately.

279. Outside, Levavasseur waits before his chauffeured car, beside Blériot's own vehicle. Léon smokes a cigar. He sees Blériot approach and nervously extinguishes the stogie. He opens the back door for Blériot, without a word.

280. Inside, Levavasseur speaks. He offers to buy Blériot out. He has a generous price in mind, and he knows Blériot is nearing the end of his finances, if he hasn't already gone bankrupt. Blériot of course does not agree to this arrangement. Levavasseur says he has a plan in the works that may change Blériot's mind, one way or another. Blériot assures him he is immovable, bids him good day.

281. Léon insists that Blériot hear him out: Levavasseur says he's entering the channel competition, and that a man named Latham will be crossing first, in the latest Antoinette monoplane. Blériot must surely be aware what crossing means, both for the man and the company to do so: Riches, fame, the status of legend. Not too late for Blériot to be a part.

282. Blériot sits silent. Léon tells him to forget ego and take some money, work for Antoinette as designer and possibly pilot. Blériot would do well to think of his family and reputation. "Come with me, Louis. Join Antoinette! Abandon these broken dreams of yours and help me to realize my own."

283. Blériot shakes Léon's hand, wishes him luck. But, he'll have nothing to do with Levavasseur's offers and tells him to expect resistance at the next board meeting. Blériot exits the car, without niceties. Léon only chuckles, lights his cigar again, tells the driver to go.

284. Next day: Blériot and Collin meet with Robert Esnault-Pelterie, in the cluttered and claustrophobic confines of Pelterie's parts-laden workshop. Blériot says "No more Antionettes!" He wants the REP engines to power his planes. Pelterie says he can provide engines, yes, but it will take time to modify them for use in the Blériot monoplane. Blériot wants to start immediately. Today. Pelterie says Blériot can borrow an engine for the time, and that he'll get to work on another more advanced model tomorrow morning. Done.

285. As they exit, Blériot and Collin argue. Collin warns Blériot that the REP engines are not very good: They have cooling problems and are generally unreliable. Blériot should consider another engine: The Anzani. "Anzani?!" yells Blériot. "Impossible. The man is crazy." "Yes, Louis, but his engines do work."

286. Night, at the Blériot home. Blériot is studying legal documents, with the assistance of Alice. She says he sees nothing in his agreement with the Antoinette company that could prevent Léon from competing against him. There is simply no legal recourse. Blériot assures her tomorrow's board meeting of the Antoinette company will decide matters. Afterward, Blériot's direction will be clear. Alice excuses herself, kisses Blériot on the forehead and goes off to bed. Blériot thinks for awhile, alone.

287. The next day, a bustling meeting of the Antoinette company in its own workshop. All the principals are there, including Gastambide and a smiling, hand-shaking Latham, who seems to be getting all the attention. Space is tight.

288. Blériot enters, with Collin. The workshop goes quiet. Except for Latham, who approaches Blériot, cigarette in mouth. He offers his hand to Blériot, says, "Monsieur Blériot! I am Hubert Latham! So good to meet you, at last!" Blériot hesitates, but then he shakes, does not smile. "Oui."

289. Latham is an innocent, lost in his own joi d'être. And for a man who's been set against Blériot, he's oddly benign.

290. The meeting begins. First is Blériot's protest against Antoinette company for outrageous, covert competitive action. He asks that the company abandon its activities.

291. The board hem-haws, but is immovable. Léon smiles through it all, like a devil. Latham doesn't seem to really understand anything. At the end, Blériot says, "Since you are all set against me on this issue, I have no choice but to resign, immediately, from the Antoinette company, and to dissolve my interests. I wish you all well." Blériot and Collin exit. The room is silent. Latham, strangely, is still smiling and looking around, as if waiting for the second act at a play he's enjoying.

292. Ministry of Defense Building, General André's office. He's singing some papers when the desk phone rings. He answers, is told that Blériot has parted ways with the Antoinette company. "Really? No. Give the good Blériot a few days. Correct. But, ring me first." André hangs up, smiles, thinks a moment, goes back to his papers.

293. Across town, Voisin and Blériot share their espressos, as always. Blériot says nothing, then clears his throat. "I have decided on REP engines. What do you think?" Voisin is skeptical, says they overheat too easily. "I will build a radiator." Voisin nods hesitantly. Blériot asks, "So, this Latham chap: What do you know of him?" Voisin launches into a brief but accurate description of Latham, told in montage and voice over: Latham is family rich, personable, well-educated. Also a fun-loving adventurous playboy. We see Latham's boating exploits, his big-game pursuits on safari, and even enjoy his fabled meeting with the President of France. PRESIDENT: "And you, Mr. Latham, what is your occupation?" LATHAM: "Monsieur President, I am a man of the world."

294. When Voisin finishes, Blériot says nothing. And then, "Seems like an all right fellow." Voisin agrees, says he's being used by his cousin for the Channel attempt, like a piece of furniture. Yes, Gastambide is Latham's cousin. "Ah, well." says Blériot, "I have pursued my dreams. Better than to have done nothing."

295. Outside the Blériot workshop, Levavasseur and the Welferinger brothers arrive in a lorry. They exit, enter the shop, speak to Collin. They are here for the engine Blériot ordered and will now not use. Collin sets Mamet upon getting it ready as one of the brothers leaves to back the lorry. Collin lights a cig, and Levavasseur of course sees the newest Blériot monoplane, the XI. He seems intrigued.

296. "Has it flown?" he asks. "Oh, yes," says Collin. "The best yet." "So tiny," says the Welferinger, "A breeze would flatten it."

297. On this, Blériot himself arrives. He acknowledges Levavasseur, assures him he'll find his engine in good working order. Blériot instructs Collin to prepare the XI for transport: He wants to fly tomorrow morning. Collin yells for Mamet, Blériot walks off and leaves them to their devices.

298. Next morning: The Blériot XI flying well near Issy, just after dawn. All of Paris is covered with 13 centimeters of lovely snow. The XI's engine chugs loudly and the plane force-glides to an unexpected but smooth landing on the drifts. Collin, alone, runs to Blériot, breathing heavy. "Overheated. Again. We will wait a few minutes." Collin, exhausted, nods.

299. Later, the XI lifts from the snowy fairgrounds, goes cleanly into the sky like a proper flying machine. It turns easily and efficiently, is calm in demeanor. But, the engine chugs again, and Blériot plows the plane to a landing. Collin runs through the snow. "We will wait a few minutes."

300. A bit later the XI is back in the air, flying well. Yet the engine complains again and the XI drops back to the ground. Collin runs over, and exhausted from fighting the snow, angrily refuses to start the REP engine again. Blériot, still in the cockpit, insists Collin start the blasted thing.

301. Collin flatly refuses, storms away. They yell at one another across the snow, Collin finally stops and walks back. "Alright," says Blériot, "What should we do?" "Anzani!" yells Collin. Blériot reluctantly agrees.

302. A week later: Outside Paris, snows have mostly melted. At an abandoned park is a small gathering of men. Among them is the animated excitable Italian, Anzani. He adjusts a bizarre machine: A motorcycle with a large propeller coming out of the handlebars, attached to a driveshaft and with engine sitting before a low-riding seat at the rear.

303. Blériot and Collin arrive in the Panhard, in time to see Anzani sit on the motorcycle seat and one of his mechanics turn the prop. The contraption starts, makes a high-pitched buzzing scream. Anzani releases the brake and the motorcycle zooms down the parkway. As they watch incredulous, Anzani stops the bike, turns it, releases the brake and returns to the starting point. He brakes again and cuts the engine. Oil and residue is everywhere, a real mess.

304. Anzani barks orders in highly gesticulated Italian. His men run in compliance. He leaps to meet Blériot and Collin.

305. The conversation immediately turns to engines. Blériot proposes that Anzani design and build an engine capable of flights of more than an hour. Anzani dramatically explains that he's been exactly making just such an engine. "Mama mia! This day, at last!" Anzani assures Blériot that a three-cylinder engine of superb durability will be made and delivered shortly. He tells Blériot that he will not accept payment for the engines until they've been proven reliable and useful. They all shake.

306. Anzani wants Blériot to try the Aéro-Motocyclette. Blériot politely refuses, but Anzani insists he at least sit.

307. Blériot does so, seems to be imagining himself in motion. Anzani will start the engine. Blériot hesitates, but then excitedly agrees. The propeller cranks and the cycle dashes off. Blériot cocks the wheel and immediately crashes, to Anzani's huge amusement. Blériot is unhurt.

308. In the Blériot workshop, activity consumes the final stages of yet another design: A large monoplane with a cockpit sitting beneath its wing. It has two seats. Somewhat bigger than the XI, this plane looks solid but sparse. Blériot enters with Collin, they discuss the Anzani purchase and the fact that the XI is perfectly capable of flying with the REP for the time.

309. Blériot inspects the XII. He's pleased. For the first time he'll have two entirely different planes for testing and learning. It's an exciting era, but perilous indeed.

310. Two suited men enter the factory to see Blériot. From an attorney across town. They want to discuss a business matter.

311. In Blériot's office, the trio discuss Blériot's failing finances, and that several companies supplying the Blériot enterprises have gone without payment for weeks. This cannot continue. Blériot says he has told each and every one of his vendors that things would be slow for a time. He's outraged that attorneys have gotten involved. The two men tell Blériot that they'll be forced to seek relief in the courts if they don't see some payment in the next few days. Blériot is enraged, but controlled, and he throws the men out.

312. Collin comes and asks what's up. Blériot doesn't answer, tells Collin to get the XI ready for flight in the morning. Blériot is going home now. Collin should lock-up.

313. A press conference in Paris, at the Académie des Sciences. In attendance are Levavasseur, Latham, and Gastambide. It's a somewhat large and exciting affair, with many photos being taken and lots of reporters hovering about.

314. Levavasseur takes the podium, officially announces Latham as the champion who will conquer the English Channel. They plan to fly as soon as Latham masters the unique and patented control system of the Antoinette Monoplane. Someone asks about Blériot, and Levavasseur laughs, says, "The Prince of Bad Luck will do well to keep from crashing long enough to see Latham returning triumphant from Dover." The crowd roars.

315. Latham is asked a few questions. He says simply, "I wish everyone the best of luck against me, especially monsieur Blériot." In the background an unseen reporter yells, "Good chap, Blériot!" Levavasseur chortles, says, "Perhaps so, but we don't expect he'll pose a challenge, in his kite." More laughter. Levavasseur subtly glares at Latham.

316. Next day, Issy: Blériot XI is here. Blériot makes finals. Contact! Away goes XI. Blériot ascends. All seems well. He levels the plane and sees something ahead, flying in the air, rapidly approaching.

317. Blériot dives quickly as a monoplane rockets past, its engine louder than anything he's ever heard. As if on cue, Blériot's REP engine chugs and loses power. Blériot steers the XI toward a group of men and autos below. He lands hard, and not until he gets right up to the group does he realize it's Levavasseur and company. An uncomfortable moment.

318. Léon walks to Blériot, asks what the problem is. Blériot says he's testing a forced landing. Léon chuckles, asks if he needs a crank. Blériot nods, Léon motions for one of the Welferinger brothers. They get him started and Blériot bounces down the parade grounds, back into the sky. "A visit from heaven, and it's The Prince of Bad Luck!" says Léon. The whole crew laughs.

319. Blériot's back in the sky, flying nicely. All is well. The enjoyment of flight is now pristine and uninterrupted.

320. Blériot senses something to his left. It's Latham nearby, flying parallel! Blériot moves over next to him, and for the first time in history, two planes fly together. Latham gives a "thumbs-up" to Blériot, who is at first hesitant, but then returns the unfamiliar gesture.

321. This close, the Antoinette Monoplane is clearly readable: It's a magnificent piece of design, beautifully appointed and much larger than the Blériot XI. And while the Blériot XI is simply functional and tidy, the Antoinette has flare and panache. Latham breaks off, as does Blériot. The XI moves a perfect landing at the Blériot camp.

322. Once out of the plane, Blériot says they must now move operations from the confines of Issy to Buc, near Versailles. "I want to regularly be in the air for more than an hour at a time before 1909 is finished." Collin tells him that Levavasseur has the same thing in mind, and he's heard they're moving the entire Antoinette enterprise to Chalons. Blériot nods, walks away.

323. Blériot is alone, in the Boeuf. He drinks his espresso quietly, calmly. There's a ruckus, Latham enters the café with a cadre of reporters and a lovely woman on his arm. He's asked many questions. The talk of his imminent channel crossing is electric.

324. Latham spies Blériot, moves over to him. The room goes hush. With a large smile he greets Blériot, who stands to shake hands. Latham says it was a pleasure sharing the sky this afternoon. Blériot agrees. Latham wants to ask Blériot a few questions about wind currents and altitude change while in a prolonged turn.

325. Blériot responds with silence, but then smiles and bids Latham sit. Latham politely dismisses his feminine charge, sits for a chat. The reporters scribble madly.

326. Outside the Boeuf, General André waits in his official limousine. He watches Latham exit with his woman and the press cadre. André's impatient, wants to know where Blériot is. Ah! Blériot exits, looks disoriented. One of André's men goes and brings Blériot to the car.

327. Blériot meets André, who simply introduces himself by stating his position. Blériot knows who he is, of course, and asks what he wants. André says it's thought that in a matter of months the English Channel will be crossed by a single man who will defeat all others. That man will become very important, not only to France but to the world. And then, to history itself. André says, "There are men suited to this kind of fortune. Those who can handle it well, and those who cannot. I'm fond of your determination and foolhardiness, Louis. And, your humility." Blériot thanks him, again politely asks why they're talking.

328. André smiles enigmatically. "To give you something to think about. Don't give up, Louis. I will look favorably upon the man who destroys the age-old barrier of land and sea." A pause. "I hope such a man will also look favorably upon me. Do you understand?" Blériot gets it. He shakes André's hand, excuses himself.

329. April 1909: Latham in the Antoinette, flying well and waving to farmers below him. He comes to an expert landing at the Chalons camp, is greeted by a couple newspaper men. Latham smiles as usual, lights his cigarette, speaks pleasantly about the Antoinette and how incredibly stable it is. They will attempt an in-flight record tomorrow in fact, not to be missed. A British reporter asks if Blériot is even considered in the game of aviation at present. Latham says, "I wish Monsieur Blériot the best in all he does." Latham excuses himself, goes to a tent where Levavasseur works on a contract. He secures the door to the tent.

330. "Léon, I do not much like being set against Blériot. The man has no chance." Levavasseur says, "Of course. The papers need something to print." Latham sits emotionless, then says, "Without me, Léon, you have no pilot. Remember that."

331. Levavasseur approaches Latham, says with slow iciness, "You are nothing, sir, but a man with his mother's money. You will fly. And, you will put an end to embarrassing me on matters of Blériot. Do you understand?" Latham nods. He's clearly afraid to cross Léon.

332. Dawn, at Buc: Blériot lands the XII for the first time. A single reporter is here to write about it, and only asks Blériot what he calls the new plane. Blériot hands his goggles and helmet to Collin, says there is a matter he must attend in Paris, but he's happy with the XII. Collin says they might consider replacing the ENV engine with Anzani, to remain consistent...but Blériot says that only the XI, for now, will have the Mad Italian's power plant.

333. The Blériot lighting/automotive company, Paris: Assembled in a conference room are the entire board of the company, four gentlemen and a couple secretaries. Blériot enters, all business, with a folder. He sits, tells the men that he's selling his stake in the Blériot company, effective immediately. He will maintain a small percentage of the assets--quite small--and the company is now free to operate any way it sees fit.

334. They're shocked, say nothing. Blériot claps his hands once, says "Voilà," and rises. The rest rise and exit slowly. One man, an old, wizened character, stops and confronts Blériot. "This obsession for the problems of the air, as you say: It's killing you, Louis. Have you really stopped to think?" Blériot smiles. "We each have our burden, Pierre. Thank you."

335. Blériot estate, night: Late dinner with Blériot and Alice. Blériot eats heartily. Alice sort of watches him, puzzled. "You're hungry tonight," she says. Blériot suddenly stops, tells Alice he's sold the company. She simply gets up and walks away.

336. They meet in the kitchen, where Alice is teary-eyed and angry. They argue, Alice saying she's trying, but the strain is too much: Blériot is destroying everything he's ever worked for. He's beaten but refuses to stop. He is no better than a man hooked on drink.

337. Blériot tells Alice about the visit from André. This changes her shade slightly. She wants to know if the general guaranteed a purchase of Blériot planes if the channel is crossed. "If I'm confident with the XI or XII, I will try it." Alice points out that he didn't answer the question. Blériot only says, "I don't know."

338. She embraces him. "At least you admit it as much. Foolish man. The children and I can't live this way, you know." "Yes, I know." Blériot says the money from the sale will keep things going until the beginning of June, but no longer. "That is the watermark," he says. "Then you have that long, Louis," she tells him, "and afterward, your family will come first. That is *my* watermark."

339. The next day, later in the afternoon: At Buc, Blériot flies the XI over the L'étang du Trou-Salé (a large pond), frightening a raft of ducks. Collin and Mamet, nearby, look quite bored.

340. Blériot circles the grounds. His engine quits and the XI drops heavily into the large pond. It's immediately submerged, but Blériot is able to stand on the floating fuselage to await rescue.

341. We hang on his contemplation as Mamet and Collin slowly approach via rowboat in the background.

342. The next day, morning at Chalon: Latham is posing for photographs in the Antoinette, along with a male passenger, a reporter from the Daily Mail. Levavasseur watches keenly. Another reporter yells "Good show!" and on that, Latham signals to Léon for ignition. Léon waves at one of the Welferinger brothers, who cranks the Antoinette prop. The plane comes alive, moves quickly into the sky to cheers from the ground.

343. The Antoinette does a broad circle, returns where it started for an expert landing. Léon talks with a reporter about getting front page coverage in Britain. The reporter assures him that his generous hospitality on this junket cements just such a favorable position. Léon and the reporter shake hands, Latham poses for more photos.

344. At Buc, minutes later: Blériot makes a nice turn in the XII, is noticeably at ease. A picturesque if lonely scene.

345. Blériot lands to find Anzani at the camp, with a lorry containing a trio of new engines. The Mad Italian is beside himself for delivering these engines so quickly, and is desperate to install them. Blériot asks, calmly, why Anzani saw fit to drive all the way to Buc when he could simply have dropped the engines at the workshop, in Paris? Anzani swoons, "Then let us away to Paris, dear Blériot! My engines ache for the air!"

346. Later at the Blériot workshop, Anzani installs one of his three cylinder, triangular engines into the XI. He animatedly directs Blériot's crew in things to do: Connect this, move that...

347. Lunch, outside. Anzani is strangely quiet, sitting next to the building eating his sandwich alone. Blériot and Collin join him. Collin asks about the lubrication, Anzani raises his hands for silence. "I do not work while I eat, señor, please." Blériot and Collin smile at one another, then bite their meals.

348. In the background, P'tit Louis rushes up with newspaper in hand, gives it to Collin without a word. Collin looks at the paper and his face goes blank. Blériot asks what's on. Collin holds up the paper: LATHAM TO CROSS ENGLISH CHANNEL.

349. Blériot in his office with Collin and Anzani, discussing Latham's announcement. Collin asks whether they should continue at all with what they are doing. Blériot sees no choice. Anzani is less tactful, suggests crossing the channel tonight. "I can have the engine ready!" Collin dismisses him as crazy, Anzani takes offense and the two men nearly come to blows. Blériot intervenes forcefully, says to forget Latham and just continue.

350. Anzani demands to know: Does Blériot intend to try? Blériot says, "If I can make flights of more than an hour, yes." Anzani slams his fist on Blériot's desk: "Then sir, I swear to you, my engines will keep you in the air for five hours! I swear it!" He pauses. "Besides, I want to be paid for these engines." A big smile.

351. Contact! The Anzani chugs to life in the XI, Blériot at the controls. It's the Issy grounds again. The Anzani looks like an upside-down "Y" and it rattles strangely, drips oil noticeably. Anzani yells at Blériot to remember the crankcase oil, to pump every two minutes.

352. And away goes Blériot, in the first Anzani-powered flight. The plane flies very smoothly, but Blériot finds out right away that the engine spits oil constantly. His face and goggles are quickly covered, so he turns the plane around for a landing.

353. The crew rushes over to see what's up. Blériot wants a rag to wipe his face. Anzani approaches the engine, puts his hand on it. "Barely warm!" he yells. Blériot looks sour. "With the oil it's putting in my face, I certainly hope so." Blériot signals for contact, Anzani obliges, screams "Every two minutes!" to Blériot. The XI zips down the lawn and into the sky.

354. Latham and Levavasseur drinking wine in the Boeuf. Santos-Dumont walks by their table, asks to sit. "But of course." They briefly discuss the channel announcement. Dumont says Farman is considering an announcement as well, since he's gotten excellent results of late from his Voisin aeroplane. And will Dumont try the crossing, asks Léon? No, not as yet. But there is another person coming, he hears, an unexpected contestant.

355. Dumont say the man is flying a Wright Brothers biplane, and his name is Count Charles de Lambert, a rich Russian who's been taught to fly by the Wrights themselves.

356. "The devil with this 'Count'," says Léon. "No, I want to see him. Where is he?" Dumont says he's been at the Grand Hotel for the past two days, but is somewhat reclusive.

357. Levavasseur and Latham's meals arrive. Léon gets up from the table says, "We shall see. Let's go, Hubert. Thank you monsieur Dumont. Good day." Léon lays francs on the table, he and Latham walk out, leaving their meals untouched. Dumont looks around a bit, then eagerly pulls Léon's sandwich in front of him and dines.

358. Blériot flying the XI. The Anzani rattles and hums, but is unfaltering. Blériot must wipe his goggles occasionally, but he's otherwise enjoying the bliss of stable flight.

359. He makes a wide turn, lands easily back at the camp. Collin greets him, says the time is a full eleven minutes in the air, and this on the first run. Blériot is pleased.

360. At the Grand Hotel, Léon and Latham arrive to find a storm of reporters. Count de Lambert--a gently smiling, attractive and well-dressed man--rises from a table and dismisses himself with a nod, moves to a lift with a couple of assistants. Léon sees the reporter he knows, from the Daily Mail. Before Léon can say a word, the reporter asks, "So what do you think of the news?"

361. Léon is clueless. The reporter tells him that the Count has officially entered the race to cross the channel. Léon is disturbed, but blows it off: "He will fail." "Then Levavasseur will only have to worry about Farman." What?! Yes, Farman announced earlier this morning that he's joining the race.

362. So it's now a battle of three. Rumor has it Blériot may enter as well, though it's unlikely. Léon is jealously concerned, but Latham just says, "What is life without competition? Very boring, indeed." Reporters nearby pick-up this quote, scribble madly.

363. Levavasseur then dramatically climbs on a table, calls for quiet. He yells, "In a few hours, you will see why Latham is to be the first man across the channel! Be at Chalons tomorrow morning, and witness the future of aviation: The Antoinette Company!" The crowd is set fire.

364. Next morning: Huge gathering at Chalons. Latham is there, signs autographs and poses for papermen. Levavasseur wastes no time making the rounds. Blériot arrives, with Voisin. They're surprised by the numbers in attendance.

365. Levavasseur announces that they are about to begin. They will attempt a world record, and hope to push aviation into the foreground of everyone's thoughts, around the globe.

366. His man Latham will now perform a flight of more than an hour, which will shatter standing barriers and demonstrate that Latham and the Antoinette Company truly own the air.

367. Just a show for the papermen, says Voisin. Blériot is unsure. Latham takes off in the Antoinette. He flies a couple circles around the crowd, heads off for a larger circuit.

368. Time passes at Chalons, and the chatter is high. Blériot checks his watch, tells Voisin that it's been nearly an hour. Voisin says he knows, he's been watching the shadows.

369. The Antoinette in the background suddenly makes a turn back for the starting point. To huge cheers and applause, Latham lands with an in-air time of one hour and seven minutes: The best in history, eclipsing even the flights of the Wright Brothers.

370. Levavasseur announces Latham as the man who will fly the Antoinette into immortality, over the English Channel. Blériot and Voisin clap, but their faces are grave. Levavasseur sees Blériot across the crowd, winks at him.

371. Voisin and Blériot, in the Boeuf, as per usual. Blériot says it will be Latham across first. Voisin agrees, but is curious about this Count de Lambert: The Wrights have a good plane. Not very versatile or advanced, but it flies steadily.

372. Blériot says for his part, he does not foresee making a channel attempt. Voisin is surprised to hear this. Blériot tells him he's very little money left.

373. Voisin says Blériot should absolutely enter the Douai competition upcoming. It would be a way to win a few francs and keep afloat. Blériot says he's considering it, but only if it's clear he will not fly the channel. Then he says, "I fear this has all been for nothing, dear Voisin."

374. The next day, at Issy: The Blériot entourage is here, and the XII sits parked nearby. Blériot himself is landing the XI in the background. He taxis up to his crew, Collin click a stopwatch.

375. "Fifteen minutes, Louis. The best time yet." Blériot nods, wants the XII made ready.

376. At that moment Santos-Dumont and news reporter Fournier drive up in an old Renault. Santos runs to Blériot, tells him the news: Latham is in Dover!

377. Blériot freezes-up. "He has crossed the channel?!" Yes! He's in England! Blériot cannot believe it. He knows his life is finished, but he smiles anyway. "Well. Good for him. I shall send a telegram of congratulations."

378. Santos laughs and laughs, Fournier politely chuckles. "No, no, monsieur! He went across in a boat! He's looking for a good spot to land! He's only scouting!"

379. Blériot puts his hand on Dumont's shoulder, has a good chuckle out of it. "I see." But Fournier tells Blériot that Latham has officially announced a timeframe for his channel flight. "He says he's going in a fortnight, monsieur. Not much time remains."

380. Blériot looks defeated. He puts an arm around both Dumont and Fournier, invites them to fly with him: The XII can handle it.

381. Dumont, Fournier, and Blériot in the moving XII. The monoplane takes quickly across the lawn, climbs easily into the sky.

382. In the plane, Dumont and Fournier marvel at Blériot's controls and superb views. "Vive Blériot!" yells Fournier.

383. Landing. Fournier exits with Dumont and Blériot, and he's oddly excited. "Monsieur Blériot," he says, "you have just made history." Yes, Blériot has now become the first ever to take two passengers into the air. Blériot is confused. He thought the Wrights did this. No. Blériot is the first. "I will write a story on this immediately." Dumont hurries Fournier into the Renault, they depart.

384. Collin smoking a cigg says to Blériot, "I wonder if his story will hurt or help?" Blériot smiles, tells Collin he wants to start flying the XI full-time, wants to prepare for possibly entering the Douai competition, and wants to fly until the money is gone. Collin tells Blériot that without attempting the channel, it won't matter what Blériot does at Douai. Perhaps so. But Blériot is resolved to continue.

385. The next day - cover of Le Martin: BLÉRIOT MAKES HISTORY WITH TWO-PASSENGER FLIGHT. Cover of Daily Mail - BLÉRIOT TRIUMPHS! IS THE CHANNEL CROSSING NEXT? Cover of Le Petit Parisian: - BLÉRIOT! BLÉRIOT! BLÉRIOT!

386. Blériot quietly drives into Paris, well-dressed and not too happy. People see him driving by, wave. He's confused.

387. Blériot enters his workshop. Anzani isn't here. Everyone stops their work and cheers. P'tit Louis brings Blériot copies of the papers. Blériot cannot believe it. He's stunned. Collin crushes-out his cigarette.

388. "You see, Louis? It was more than a flight of two passengers." Blériot is relieved. He slaps the paper, says, "This is why we fight!" On this, the two suited attorneys that Blériot threw out now return, this time with another man: Blériot's accountant. Blériot sees them, looks angry. "I'll handle it," he says, and approaches the men.

389. Levavasseur and Latham, at Wissant, having returned from Dover. They sit in a café. Léon reads the paper with the TWO-PASSENGER headline. He looks concerned.

390. Latham says nothing, but sees a lorry with two huge crates rattle by, moving down the road toward the cliffs. He asks Levavasseur what he thinks that is? A man at a table next to them says, "That's one of the Wright Brothers' planes. It belongs to the Comte de Lambert. You are not the only two keen for the prize." Léon asks who the man is. The man simply smiles, unseats himself and walks away. Léon bolts from his table, but doesn't follow the man. Instead he locates the lorry with the crates. Latham joins him. "No time to lose. Let's go."

391. In Blériot's office, the accountant says there's no money left, save a few francs to cover expenses and salaries through the week. But certainly no money of any sort to pay the overdue vendors, and absolutely no money to pay for Anzani's engines.

392. One of the attorneys says they've been approached by a man who wishes to buy Blériot Aeronautique. He will assume all debt and all assets, and Blériot will have to seek other employment, but only after signing a non-compete agreement. Blériot nods. "Gastambide, correct?" The attorney is nervous, says he's not at liberty to discuss it.

393. Blériot is not sure what to do. "No money at all?" His own accountant cannot help. "I'm sorry, monsieur." Blériot sits silent, defiant, angry, and powerless. He looks the men over carefully, pondering what to do.

394. There is suddenly a great commotion and yelling in the warehouse. Above the din is heard "He's in the office!" The door to the office bursts open, Blériot leaps to his feet, as do the other men.

395. Standing there is Voisin. He sees that he's interrupted a meeting, and goes from maniacally joyous to sorely apologetic. Blériot is perturbed, but asks what he wants.

396. Voisin, barely able to restrain himself, says, "The Prix Osiris, Louis! We've won it! You and I, together!" Blériot frowns. "Do you not understand?!" yells Voisin, "50,000 francs for me, and 50,000 for you! The newspaper people are going crazy!"

397. Collin and the rest of Blériot's men assemble behind Voisin. Blériot at first just stands and frowns. Then he walks to Voisin, embraces him and laughs heartily. He turns to the three suits who've visited, says, "Gentlemen, it appears we have nothing further to discuss. If you please?" Blériot motions to the door. The three men leave, mumbling congratulations en route.

398. Outside, the attorneys and Blériot's accountant converse. The attorneys do not know this "Prix Osiris". Blériot's attorney explains that it's a prize given every three years by Académie Française to a Frenchman whose work has done the most for the process of science, or who has produced something useful.

399. The attorney scoffs: "Planes which always crash are not useful, Pierre, and your 50,000 francs will not last long." The attorneys walk off.

400. Back inside the Blériot workshop, he and Voisin discuss the amazing honor. Voisin says that he will use his share of the prize to perfect a new aeroplane-- and he assumes Blériot will now attempt the channel? No: Blériot has no reason to believe his aircraft capable of such a flight; he would be a fool to risk certain failure. However, he tells Voisin that the prize money enables him to compete at the Douai competition. He will put all energies there.

401. The next day, dawn. Blériot rises from bed, has his tea and thinks. He walks to the barn where the hawk is. He opens the cage door as per usual, but the hawk won't go.

402. Blériot, well-dressed, goes to his office in the Panhard. On the streets of Paris, people gawk over today's paper. Blériot is pleased and surprised.

403. He enters the workshop, everyone is sitting around dejected. He's shocked. Have they not seen the papers?! Yes, they have. Collin hands one to Blériot: LATHAM NOW PREPARED TO FLY THE CHANNEL. A subhead reads DE LAMBERT YET TO ARRIVE. Collin says to turn the page. Bottom-left corner, second page, a small story about Blériot and Voisin's Prix Osiris.

404. Collin says he doesn't think Latham and Léon have had time to properly prepare: It's a ploy to sell papers. Blériot says to forget it. He must get ready for the Douai, as must they all. The plane needs to be packed, and so on. But he will send someone to Sangatte and see just what's happening.

405. Next day, morning: Alice, in a Henri-driven Panhard, arrives near Sangatte, close to the Antoinette camp. Latham is in the air, making trial runs over the cliffs.

406. The crowd here is unexpectedly large and the atmosphere carnival-like: Children run and play, people picnic, reporters cluster and gab. There are men, horses, mechanics, a makeshift headquarters building, and an area obviously built for press conferences. Alice is impressed, writes down all she sees. A police officer approaches the Panhard. He asks Henri if he's here to watch the flight. Henri says they're just passing through, the policeman says that Latham is going tomorrow morning, they should stay and watch.

407. Douai Aerodrome: The First "World Airshow" with at least 15,000 people in attendance. Many planes here, some familiar, some not. Voisin is in the air as Blériot watches from the area of his XII, which is in a state of readiness. There is discussion about the stakes and prize monies. Collin thinks Blériot should go for altitude, but Blériot is going for circular laps.

408. Blériot flies impeccably, making lap after lap around the aerodrome. Finally he lands to cheers and sighs. He tells Collin, "I should have chosen a harder category." Collin thinks he's too modest. "That was a textbook flight, boss."

409. An official walks over, states Blériot has taken the prize for circular flight. Blériot shakes his hand, expressionless. Collin is very happy but Blériot says, "More will be required. I want to enter for the distance run, two days from now. But right now I'm very tired. I'm going to the hotel." As Blériot walks away, his tiny entourage is left mystified by his behavior.

410. Later, Blériot, lying wide awake and fully clothed in his hotel room. The phone rings. It's Alice. She tells Blériot that Latham flies the channel tomorrow. Difficult news, indeed. He thanks her, tells her to please join him here, in Douai, he needs her now. He hangs up, goes back to staring at the ceiling.

411. Next Morning, Sangatte, before Sunrise: It's foggy, with a slight drizzle. Léon reluctantly approaches a pool of reporters, who stand around a burning fire to keep warm and dry. Léon says that there will be no flying today, because of the weather. But if things change, they'll be the first to know. He walks away.

412. It's also raining where Blériot is. He stands before the window of his hotel room, already dressed. He seems to await something. The phone rings. It's Collin. The Latham attempt was called-off this morning. Blériot says he is relieved to hear this, but doesn't know why. "He'll go sooner or later."

413. A knock. Alice arrives with a small bouquet of purple and white flowers. They embrace. Blériot tells her he's going to attempt a flight of an hour or more in the competition. And he loves the flowers. They kiss.

414. Later, at the Antoinette camp: The rain has stopped, but it's foggy and the channel can't be seen. Léon tinkers with the Antoinette engine. He tells Latham to take a car down to de Lambert's camp, see what's going on. Latham agrees, Léon starts the engine of the monoplane for show while his mechanics restrain its takeoff. The small attending crowd gives a cheer.

415. Latham, in car, arrives near the de Lambert encampment. There's absolutely nothing going on here. The crates with the Wright biplanes are sitting with a couple guards. Latham smiles, lights a cigarette, leans back and covers his eyes with his hat.

416. Blériot dreams: In fancy, formal attire, Blériot flies the XII through a flawless, starry night. Rivers below sparkle as diamonds across a tremendous ballroom floor, and Alice is with him, snuggled by his side, her hair blowing in the moonlight, her dress fit for a monarch.

417. Blériot holds Alice close and whispers in her ear, "We fly." The French countryside rolls under them like so many miles of greenish evening gowns...

418. Next day, dawn: Blériot and Alice, in the hotel room bed. Blériot stirs, wakes, walks to the window. A splendid day has arrived. He says, "Good for him" under his breath.

419. Midway in the English Channel, the French destroyer Harpon cruises gentle waves. Outside at the railing is Levavasseur and Captain Pinon. Levavasseur studies the weather. He's not convinced it's a good day to fly. They return below.

420. Latham, at camp, waits for word at the Marconi wireless. The weather here is ideal, reporters gathered near seem very excited, as do the crowd of onlookers. The wireless comes with a message from Dover: "Foggy here, and wet. Visibility nil." Latham is deflated. "The weather has become an enemy."

421. Douai: No weather problems. Farman completes a flight in his Voisin. It's here we see some tension for the first time between Voisin and Farman. Blériot, in his flight gear, notices and makes a comment. Voisin says that he and Farman are soon to part ways, and that between Blériot and himself, there will be no channel attempt by Farman. Blériot has mixed feelings, and says they will discuss it later.

422. Voisin asks where Anzani is. Blériot says he's in his own workshop, building the engine for the XII.

423. Blériot arrives with Alice at his XII, and his crew are happy to see him. They report that bad weather on the Dover side has kept Latham on the ground once more. Mamet says he heard Latham may make an attempt at night. Blériot dismisses this, as does Collin. "Impossible to fly at night, even for the mighty Latham." They all laugh.

424. A competition official comes up, says he is ready when Blériot is ready. "Godspeed," he says. Blériot waves, and the XII is brought to life. No one seems to notice a loose flange of asbestos on the plane's right-side exhaust pipe.

425. Blériot kisses Alice, takes off, makes a beautiful ascent to cheers. He begins his turn, flying solid, confident, free.

426. A bit later, the Douai official checks his watch. Blériot flies perfectly overhead and down the aerodrome. "Twenty minutes." All seems well.

427. Blériot, in the XII, flies peacefully. But then the piece of loose asbestos insulation abruptly flies away, exposing the bare exhaust pipe. Blériot immediately feels the heat at his foot, but he absolutely cannot move it: The rudder controls are there and he would lose the plane, perhaps even his life. He tries to ignore, but then sees the fabric of his pant leg is starting to melt and smoke. He wiggles his foot, to no avail.

428. On the ground, Alice has seen the asbestos piece fall. She alerts Collin, who dismisses it as a rag that may have been left in the cockpit. Alice is not so sure.

429. Blériot looks for a landing spot. The pain is becoming more intense and the fabric of his pant leg is black with heat. Blériot closes his eyes, then opens with new resolve.

430. A bit later: The Douai official checks his watch: Forty-five minutes! Collin is ecstatic, but controlled. P'tit Louis claps. Mamet lights a cigarette. Alice watches nervously.

431. Blériot's face is a mass of controlled pain and sweat. His leg flesh is now exposed, the pant fabric and most of his boot burnt away. A red raging bloody mess is now his ankle, lower leg, and foot. Still, he endures. It appears the REP engine has another idea, however: It chugs, overheats, quits. Blériot puts the plane down gently, almost at his original starting point.

432. The official clicks his watch: Forty-seven minutes and fifteen seconds.

433. The crew run over and the crowd of 15,000 cheers wild. Blériot has other concerns, however. He extracts himself from the XII and immediately falls to the ground. They attend him, see his foot, yell for a doctor.

434. In a hospital bed, Blériot receives an exam and treatment for his injury. It's severe. They mention gangrene. Amputation is considered. Blériot's pain is monstrous, but he's also clear of mind: "You will not amputate a foot that's simply been burned! I will recover. And I will continue to fly, starting tomorrow."

435. "You will not!" yells Alice. "You must heal. And rest." Blériot says that Latham would continue, were he in this position. She reminds him he is not Latham. Blériot says he knows: Latham has never crashed a plane, nor has he a nagging wife! Alice says nothing, turns and walks from the room. Blériot realizes his error, begs her to return. She does not.

436. Outside, Alice sits-down, fuming, thinking. Then she sees across the yard the hawk's cage, left unattended. "Merde!" she says, and gets up.

437. At the cage, the hawk seems particularly cheeky. She curses the animal, then apologizes. Comic. "How like my husband you are." In vain effort, she opens the hawk's cage door. The hawk looks at her defiantly, and then jumps out, to the ground!

438. She's caught completely unawares. The hawk then looks squarely at Alice, flaps its stiff wings and catches the wind. It soars upward, rocking at first uncertainly in the breeze and lift. Then it rolls to the east and flies away.

439. Alice returns to Blériot. He's relieved, promises her he'll rest. She says she cannot stay mad at the wizard she married. Not for long, anyway. Besides, it's time to celebrate: The hawk has flown! Blériot smiles.

440. At the Antoinette camp, Latham plays cards with the mechanics. Levavasseur walks up, sits, says Blériot is out of the equation: He was injured at Douai, by his own plane. Latham is concerned. Perhaps they should pay a visit. "Are you daft?!" says Léon, "Let him stay on the ground. It's safer for him there." They discuss being ready tomorrow, and that Latham should not stay up too late.

441. The next morning: Blériot, back at home in bed, his foot elevated and heavily bandaged. The phone rings, Alice gets it. It's the doctor. He'll be by shortly. She hangs up, the phone rings again. It's Collin. Weather has again kept Latham on the ground. Newspapers and the military grow impatient.

442. Blériot has no reaction. He tells Collin to get the XI ready, as he must continue to become more comfortable flying it. Collin is concerned about Louis' foot. Blériot says he does not want to argue: Get the plane ready for Issy.

443. Blériot hangs up, tries to stand. He cannot, until he uses the crutches the doctor left. Alice is aghast. She refuses to let him leave the house like this. Blériot says that his foot is irrelevant: If he does not fly, they will have no future. He will simply have to suffer. He asks her to have the car brought around.

444. At Issy, later on. The XI is here. Blériot arrives, hobbles with one crutch. He's in serious pain. Collin tries to talk him down from flying, to no effect. Blériot gets in the XI, contact is made, and off he goes. Collin and Mamet are amazed at his sheer hard-headedness. "He will never give up, I fear."

445. Sangatte, the next morning, just before dawn: Winds howl, the Antoinette camp appears deserted. Levavasseur is here, however, bundled and perturbed, staring off toward the channel. He shakes his head, goes and wakes Latham. "No flying today. Go back to sleep." Latham, disoriented, starts to dress. "I said, go back to sleep! Idiot." Latham obeys.

446. Léon reluctantly approaches a pool of reporters, who stand around their regular fire. He reports there will be no attempt today, because of the weather. If things change, they'll be the first to know. He walks away. One reporter says this is becoming ridiculous. "Do you have us here for publicity, monsieur, or will you ever actually do something?" before Léon can answer, another reporter yells, "Blériot would fly!" There's chatter and argument among the reporters off this. Léon simply walks away.

447. At the Blériot workshop, the XII is having its engine removed. Anzani is here, agitated. Blériot arrives on crutches. Anzani immediately pulls him aside, into the office. The rest of the crew stare at the spectacle. "I knew something was wrong," says Mamet.

448. Anzani tells Blériot that he's sorry for the injury he sustained, but he must have payment for the new engine. Immediately. Blériot says they agreed he would only be paid if and when the engine ran satisfactorily, and he XII has not even flown with the engine. Anzani ponders. "You are right, monsieur. That was the agreement."

449. "But this leaves us with the XI. I need the money for this engine, Louis." Blériot sighs deeply. He knows. He will pay Anzani as soon as the cheque from the Prix Osiris comes, which will be any day now.

450. Anzani seriously considers this. He says, "Only because you are Blériot will I allow you to fly with my engine unpaid. And I pledge to support you, Great Blériot, until I am paid." Anzani dramatically walks out, passing Collin on his way. Collin says he overheard the last part, Blériot says not to worry. Collin says this Italian is crazy, a real liability. Blériot says his engines are excellent, and that the man is a harmless eccentric.

451. Blériot says he now wants to make a dramatic journey. Something to get into the papers. "At last! The channel!" says Collin. "No, I was thinking another cross-country journey, between Etampes and Orleans."

452. They get into heated argument about the uselessness of such a flight. At the end, Blériot concedes to Collin that if he can successfully make this flight, he will consider crossing the channel. So, the XI and not the XII? Yes.

453. Collin says he'll start making arrangements immediately, and that they'll encamp in La Ferme de Mondésir by nightfall. Blériot is pleased, and will leave for Etampes right away.

454. At the Antoinette camp, tensions mount. Crowds are restless. Newspaper men argue with one of the Welferingers and are threatening to leave, feeling they've been strung along by Levavasseur. The weather is fine now: Why no flight? Welferinger says to be patient, they plan to fly soon.

455. On that, the Antoinette monoplane comes to life in the background. Latham is in command, and Léon is there, too. The paper men rush forward as Latham takes off toward the channel, climbing beautifully into the sky.

456. Léon is questioned about Latham's flight, and he states that his man is making a test run. A little pre-show before tomorrow's flight across the channel. Tomorrow?! Yes, tomorrow. On that, Latham flies directly over the crowd. They all cheer.

457. Brief montage from both sides of the channel: LATHAM FLIES TOMORROW: papers, leaflets, hotel lobbies, discussion.

458. In the Harpon, Captain Pinon receives news of tomorrow's flight. He says, "Send this: If no flight tomorrow, destroyer Harpon must attend other duties and will respectfully decline further services to Messieurs Latham and Levavasseur."

459. Dusk, the Antoinette camp. As Levavasseur and his crew test the Antoinette engine (without propeller), General André arrives with a small entourage. He drives directly to the plane, exits, asks Léon if tomorrow morning will be a serious attempt or another retreat.

460. Levavasseur says that depends entirely upon the weather. André says, "Yes, the weather, the weather. I wonder if dear Blériot would be as concerned?" Léon reminds André that Blériot is not here, nor will he be. André nods, says this changes nothing, however: "I will be nearby, and will watch closely the events of tomorrow." He leaves.

461. Etampes, night: Blériot's crew arrives with XI, ready for assembly. Blériot, painfully on crutches, is there to greet them. Can they build the plane tonight, before bed? They can. Blériot bids them well, returns to his quarters.

462. Collin is concerned. He thinks it's going to be impossible for Blériot to fly with a burned foot. Besides, Latham will fly the channel tomorrow, and that will be that.

463. At the Antoinette camp, 12:01 AM, 19 July 1909: Clear night, calm sea. Crowds here are larger than ever: Bonfires burn. There is drinking, singing, and many autos parked.

464. Levavasseur stands far from the camp, observes the stunningly nighted landscape. He nods his head.

465. Levavasseur enters the wireless room, tells the operator to send a message to Dover: "Standby at 4 AM." He smiles. "And tell Captain Pinon to hold the seas safely." The operator chuckles.

466. Cliffs of Dover, 4 AM: Thick mists and drizzle cover the beauty of this natural bulwark. In the wireless station here, an operator has his head hanging out a window. With disgust, he wires to the Antoinette camp.

467. Latham, Levavasseur, Gastambide, and the operator await the 4 AM wire. It comes. Léon curses, Latham is disappointed but composed. "It may clear, Léon." Levavasseur agrees, tells the operator to give/receive reports every twenty minutes.

468. Latham says, "If I have to fly in the rain, I will." Levavasseur calls him a fool. "You'll fly when I say so. I'm going to the Harpon. If all looks well, you will hear three guns sound." Léon abruptly leaves. Gastambide shows no emotion whatsoever, but does check his pocket watch.

469. Pre-dawn, Etampes: The XI is assembled and protected by a tarp and a large dog chained to its wheels.

470. Blériot is up, shaving. There's a knock on the door. Alice gets it. A doctor has come to tend Blériot's bandages.

471. Later: Blériot in bed, the doctor checking wounds. It looks bad, with Blériot in pain. It appears he's also re-injured the foot. Blériot insists the doctor simply dress the burns and give him something safely mild for the hurting.

472. Sangatte, 5:16 AM: The day looks to be a nice one. Crowd is up, reporters snoop around near the guarded Antoinette.

473. In the wireless room, Latham gets the latest note: "Weather clearing." What does this mean? He demands to know about visibility. How far can they see? The operator clicks away. In a moment, the answer: "Can see 16 kilometers." There's a shout outside. Latham goes, sees the Harpon signaling to shore. He smiles. "I shall indeed prepare."

474. Dawn at Etampes: Blériot meets his crew at the XI. They make final checks, Blériot struggles with his leg. A small handful of townsfolk have gathering in the background.

475. Blériot says no one seems interested in his attempts anymore. Collin says everyone's with Latham, in Calais.

476. Blériot, with assistance, climbs into the XI. He winces. Collin asks time and again if he's okay. Blériot insists he's perfectly fine.

477. Levavasseur at the deck rail of the Harpon, with a pipe-smoking Pinon. He scans the entire visible seascape for weather and waves. He looks to the skies, smiles. "It is time, Captain."

478. Latham and hundreds of people are gathered near the Antoinette. Latham stands apart from all the rest, however, smoking a cigarette and watching the channel. It's a fabulous morning, indeed.

479. A gun fires, at sea. Then another. And then another. The crowd goes berserk with joy, Latham casually disposes his cigarette, dons his gear and climbs into the Antoinette.

480. Blériot positions himself in the XI, trying to find solace for the horribly hurting foot. He gets into place, seemingly comfortable. He rests a moment, then signals for contact. The Anzani chugs to life, shaking and quivering as it is wont to do.

481. Latham in the Antoinette signals contact. The massive engine cries to the morning air. The crowd is beside themselves. A moment of hesitation, and then Latham speeds down the slope, toward the English Channel. A crowd chases behind as he's up and away.

482. Blériot opens the Anzani throttle, the XI bumps down the lawn. He's quickly into the air. The first attempt to use the foot rudder is met with agony. He seems exhausted. He turns the plane around, straightens it, kills the ignition, lands hard but not badly. Collin runs over. Blériot's monumental discomfort is all too obvious. Blériot says he cannot fly. He will rest today. Collin moves to assist him from the cockpit.

483. Latham, above the English channel. The Antoinette flies beautifully and solid. Latham makes minor course adjustments, sees the Harpon below him. He quickly surpasses the destroyer, and hears the cheering crewman below.

484. On the deck of the Harpon, Levavasseur wildly waves his hat in the air. Pinon puts a hand on Léon's shoulder and they both watch as Latham flies into history.

485. Latham, in the air, watches his world unfold with great calm. It's a moment of triumph, a moment of joy. The engine, the wings. Everything's perfect. He smiles, removes from his jacket a little pocket camera.

486. Latham prepares to snap a self-portrait when the Antoinette engine misfires. He freezes. Another misfire. He puts the camera away. The engine stops completely.

487. With neither panic nor overcompensation, Latham wrangles the plane as it glides from the sky. At 1000' above water, he struggles to keep the Antoinette in a horizontal aspect.

488. Down he goes. Farther...farther...

489. On the Harpon, Levavasseur and Pinon see it all happening. Levavasseur is paralyzed with shock. Pinon simply shrugs, walks onto the bridge and barks orders for rescue.

490. Latham cruises downward. And then, impact! It's a near pancake move. While violent, Latham is completely unharmed. He jumps from the cockpit and sits directly behind it. The cold grey of the English Channel presses all around.

491. The Harpon moves into position near Latham's wreck. And there is Latham, quietly sitting and smoking a cigarette, watching the waves in the opposite direction.

492. Blériot is in bed, writing in a journal. A knock. It's Collin, with news of Latham's failure. Blériot is instantly transformed and suddenly lighter. "Get the XI ready: I'm going to fly." Collin nods, leaves. Blériot looks around, grabs a pillow. He removes the pillowcase, examines it.

493. Blériot, in full gear, hobbles on a crutch to the waiting XI. A few townspeople are here, but no real fanfare. Around his damaged foot is a comically taped and bundled pillow. The few people here whisper about it. Alice seems to have her doubts.

494. Blériot is helped into the XI. Contact! And away goes Blériot, into and above the slight mists of the area.

495. In the English Channel, Latham is assisted onto the Harpon. Levavasseur is perturbed, but the captain and crew are anything but. They applaud brave Latham. A hats-off salute, in fact.

496. Léon turns away, watches as his Antoinette is dragged aboard the Harpon and is accidentally dumped again into the ocean. "Merde!" The crew rushes to re-secure the plane. Latham smiles his enigmatic smile, continues to swap stories with Pinon.

497. Blériot is calmly in flight. The landscape is pristine below him, sprinkled with dense and not-so-dense fog. He's in pain, but manages. He checks his little map for landmarks, looks below him. He turns.

498. The Harpon: Latham is given hot cocoa and a coat. Léon looks him over with quasi-contempt, asks the symptoms of failure: Surely Latham did something foolish to cause this.

499. Latham is blunt: "Your *engine* failed us, Léon. It's now your portion to fix the problem and allow me to be back about the business of making history." Léon says nothing.

500. In great pain, Blériot lands. He's greeted by Anzani and a couple of townspeople. Anzani excitedly checks the engine. "Beautiful! No problems!"

501. Blériot asks if the landing site at Orleans is clearly marked. "Yes. An iron cross in a field of alfalfa." Blériot signals for contact, and he's back off the ground again.

502. Blériot checks his map. It's a bit foggy below. He can't see anything on the ground. Then he sees the railway. And the road. He stays between the two marks, makes a turn.

503. As he does so, his foot reminds him of its injury. He grimaces, overcorrects the plane. The aircraft wobbles, he struggles to correct. In a moment, he's gotten the XI under control, but he's in huge discomfort. He flies on, doggedly.

504. At Orleans, a crowd of 200 have gathered near the iron cross in the field, watching the skies. The sound of Blériot's engine is heard, he appears from over the treeline.

505. Collin, Alice, and the rest of Blériot's troupe are moving in the Panhard, parallel to Blériot on the road. They catch sight. Collin is pleased.

506. A motorcycle blasts past them. It's Anzani, weaving wildly as he cheers from his seat.

507. Blériot lands beautifully, to applause and commotion. He's surprised by the reception. His crew arrives just as he extracts himself and the rush begins. The outpouring is enormous. Anzani skids to a stop on his motorcycle.

508. The mayor steps forward, quickly awards Blériot the Prix du Voyage. The two newspaper people here ask what's next.

509. Blériot is helped through the crowd by Collin and Mamet. He confronts Alice, who is there smiling. Collin tells him that was a forty-four minute journey, the best yet.

510. Blériot asks for word on Latham. A newspaper guy says Latham is still at sea last he heard, that another Antoinette is being sent from the factory to Calais this evening.

511. Blériot gets the look we haven't seen in a while: Blank look of discovery when he invented the headlamp. He smiles, turns to the reporter. "Follow me, to the local wireless."

512. A huge crowd is outside the Orleans wireless. An operator, Blériot, Alice, and Collin are in the room. The operator tells him to go ahead. Blériot wants to be assured that this telegram will go directly to Daily Mail, in London. Indeed it will.

513. Blériot speaks with reasonable English: "Sir. I have the honor to inform you that I enter for the Daily Mail prize of £1000 for a cross English Channel flight by aeroplane. My intention is to compete for a prize the day after this tomorrow, on the Calais-Dover route. Receive, sir, my sincere salutations. Louis Blériot."

514. The crowd outside cheers wild.

515. Later, at Calais, a crew boat delivers Latham from the Harpon. He wears a French naval officer's raincoat over his wet clothes, and is greeted like a hero. He calls for quiet, says they're sending for another plane presently, and that he will try again tomorrow or the day next, God willing.

516. "Blériot is coming!" The crowd turns to a man who's run from the hotel. "Blériot is coming tomorrow! He crosses the channel tomorrow!" A mix of cheers and discussion fill the crowd. Latham's face goes blank, but he catches himself and claps. Levavasseur looks particularly angry.

517. Newspaper buzz blitz: MARVELOUS BLÉRIOT TO FLY THE CHANNEL! and THE PRINCE OF BAD LUCK vs. HEROIC LATHAM! and LATHAM = FAILURE, BLÉRIOT = ?

518. At Paris Gare du Nord train station, that night: Blériot and his entourage approach the platform. Blériot hobbles on crutches with Alice at his arm. He's in pain but seems of good cheer. Collin bids him well, says he'll see him with the XI tomorrow afternoon. Blériot and Alice enter a compartment.

519. On the platform, a curious, wiry young man in nice clothes scans the train. It starts to move, he jumps to action. It moves faster away, he stops, looks for an open compartment. He dashes, lands in Blériot's car!

520. He sits with Alice and Blériot, introduces himself as Charles Fontaine, tells them he's a reporter from Le Matin, and he's been assigned the coverage of Blériot's story. He will be at Hotel Terminus, where Blériot is staying.

521. Hotel Terminus, night: Blériot and Alice arrive, as does Fontaine. They're greeted by a pair of reporters from Le Matin, and Fontaine introduces them as the two who will cover this event from the France side of the channel.

522. Blériot is confused. Fontaine tells Blériot that his personal assignment is to Dover, not Calais, and that he alone will cover Blériot's triumphant landing in England.

523. Blériot bids him farewell, says he's not feeling up to further talk. He wishes Fontaine the best.

524. The next day: A wicked time on the coast of Calais, with high waves, clouds, lots of wind.

525. Levavasseur and Latham stand in their Antoinette shed, looking-over the ruined monoplane pulled from the channel. As wind howls, they see it's truly beyond repair. They simply have to wait for the new one, which should be here presently. "Not to worry: Dear Blériot will not be flying anytime soon."

526. Back at Hotel Terminus, Blériot examines the coast from his window, while drinking coffee. He smiles.

527. Downstairs, at breakfast: People point and stare at Blériot and Alice. A man comes forward, wants an autograph on his hotel napkin. Blériot obliges, stands and shakes the man's hand.

528. Fontaine watches the exchange. An idea. He approaches Blériot, excuses the intrusion, but say he has an urgent matter to discuss. Blériot seems perturbed, but walks to the side of the room with him.

529. People have noticed this, and one reporter, friendly to Léon, makes special note.

530. In whispers, Fontaine tells Blériot something. The word "Dover" is overhead, but all else is unintelligible.

531. Blériot is silent for a moment. He looks Fontaine squarely in the eye, then smiles warmly. "Yes, it is a good idea. Very good." They shake. Fontaine wishes him luck, as he's now off to take a steamer across the channel. "In this weather?!" Fontaine only shrugs and smiles, says, "My job is to never stop, monsieur!"

532. At the train depot, a shipment has arrived to curious bystanders. A pair of packages: One large bit of cargo covered in wood and canvas and a much smaller "box" covered in striped cloth. One of Fontaine's men, Guérin is here, as are Collin and the Welferinger brothers. Guérin asks Collin about the assembly time, and so on. Collin laughs. "Half as big as Latham's and maybe an hour to assemble. You are on the winning team, Guérin. And you can print that, as well."

533. Blériot arrives with his people at Les Baraques, Calais. He surveys the site. "All we need is the XI." He walks off alone, studies the sweep of the hill toward the sea. He looks over, sees the Antoinette camp not too far away.

534. There is a high-pitched engine noise. It's Anzani, arriving on motorcycle. He excitedly demands to know where the XI is. He wants to get working right away. Blériot assures him the XI is coming soon.

535. Anzani is satisfied, and now wants to eat.

536. Fontaine, now aboard a channel steamer: It's very rough, a dreadful day for crossing. Fontaine has with him a long, unmarked tube. It's easily three full meters in length.

537. Henri, Collin, and Guérin arrive at Les Baraques. There is still much to do. Anzani is going bananas over his engines. He now takes charge of the situation, says there will be no room for error in the assembly of the XI. Every last screw and wire must be as if placed by the hand of God. Collin belches loudly.

538. At the Sangatte Antoinette camp, Latham's big monoplane has arrived. The reporters and crowds cheer ecstatically. Levasseur barks orders, and the many men of his team begin a hasty assembly.

539. Latham, smoking a cigarette, says he's going to walk.

540. At Les Baraques, Collin, Anzani, and the rest assemble the XI, when in walks Latham. They stare incredulously, especially when he asks for Blériot. P'tit Louis fetches him. No ones exchanges, but Anzani stares Latham down fiercely. Latham only smiles, tips his hat. And then Blériot arrive.

541. Latham and Blériot step aside. Latham explains that they may want to try the crossing together, at the same time. Blériot is torn between sportsmanship and competition. He also smells something strange.

542. Latham says there will be only one destroyer escort standing by for rescue, and that Léon has ensured it will only be for Latham...so it would be best if they could both share the safety of the Harpon. Latham also knows that Blériot has not scouted a landing spot in Dover. Latham has. It would be a shame for Blériot to cross the channel only to have no place to land.

543. Blériot says he wishes Latham all the best, but part of the conquering of the Channel is the ability to read and deal with the weather, and to scout a landing site by other means when there is no way to do so in person. Blériot cannot be held back nor hurried forward by another man's plane, but he deeply appreciates the kind gesture. Latham, smiling, wishes Blériot well, and walks away.

544. Anzani walks up at this moment, holding a leg of chicken and eating. Blériot looks at him curiously, says he must go to town and send a telegram.

545. Later that day, rain and overcast. Both camps hide from the downpour. Flying may not be possible the next morning.

546. The Cliffs of Dover: Fontaine, walking up and away from Dover Castle. A spectacular sight. Fontaine scans the terrain with a telescope. He looks up, down, back. He makes a note.

547. The next morning: Blériot, asleep in his Calais suite, beside Alice. He stirs, is immediately hit with severe pain.

548. Blériot moves the sheets from his leg and finds his ankle in a pool of blood.

549. Later, a doctor bandages his foot. Blériot is up and dressed, sitting in a chair. The doctor says Blériot must have re-injured the ankle while sleeping. He positively must rest and not fly. Blériot says nothing.

550. The day is windy, but the sky is not bad. At the Blériot camp the XI is now assembled and ready to go. Anzani checks the ignition system with a magnifying glass. Blériot arrives, wants an update. "We should test the engine," says Anzani.

551. At the Antoinette camp, Léon and Latham examine their now assembled plane. There should be no problem this time. "All but the weather," says Latham.

552. Late afternoon, clear skies. Blériot takes a meal at the hotel. He excuses himself, walks outside. He scans the landscape: Almost no wind. He becomes agitated. He returns to the table, tells Alice he must go immediately and send telegrams: He will fly tomorrow morning.

553. Levavasseur and Latham are also out looking around, with lots of reporters and townsfolk surrounding their every move. Léon says the time has come, the weather looks good. He turns to the crowd, announces that he will go to Calais and send a telegram to indicate that Latham will fly in the morning. The crowd explodes.

554. At the telegraph, Blériot and Levavasseur encounter one-another. It's uncomfortable. Levavasseur is given preference in the sending of his notice, so Blériot must wait.

555. After leaving the office, Blériot hobbles toward his car. Henri asks if he wishes to return to the XI, but Blériot says he's going back to the hotel.

556. Henri leaves. Blériot does not return to the hotel. He instead hobbles up the street to a rustic bar, goes inside.

557. A dingy place. Blériot uncomfortably takes a spot, orders whiskey. He notices across the tavern a drinking and cajoling Latham, with two young women. Latham takes a drag from his flagon and sees Blériot. Latham stands and comes to Blériot, enthusiastically asks if he may join him. Blériot is at first unresponsive, then smiles, offers a seat.

558. Latham politely signals his absence to the women, makes a comfortable spot for himself. He's drunk. The two men talk. Blériot somberly tells Latham that they must both be mindful of the weather: It may be a good day coming. Latham laughs it off, says it's time to drink and enjoy! Flying can wait.

559. Blériot is unmoved. He observes Latham quietly. Latham laughs, slaps Blériot on the shoulder, tells him to take heart, that life is a bold adventure. All good fun. Blériot smiles weakly. He says he will fly in the morning if the weather is agreeable.

560. He tells Latham that both of them should get back to their camps soon.

561. Blériot cordially excuses himself, says to Latham, "The winds are dying. If it continues, we should be up by 3:30 AM and ready for the crossing." Blériot shakes Latham's hand, wishes him well. Blériot hobbles off, his whiskey untouched.

562. Latham, now alone, smiles to himself. Something lonely and distant about his presence.

563. At the Antoinette camp, the new monoplane undergoes an engine test, which pleases the crowd no end. It sounds amazing. Gastambide approaches Levavasseur, tells him that they cannot allow Latham to leave the camp tonight. He must sleep here. Léon will keep him in line.

564. Blériot returns to his room, where Alice waits. Collin is here, wants to know where Blériot has been. He says just for a drink. Collin says they must proceed very seriously.

565. Blériot must understand that there will be no destroyer escort for him tomorrow. Blériot only smiles. "We will see." Collin says he will send a car round 2 AM, if the weather looks fine. Blériot darkens, agrees.

566. Collin leaves, Blériot and Alice talk briefly before Blériot goes off to sleep.

567. 12:01 AM. It's clear and calm in the Antoinette camp. Latham is delivered via taxi, stumbles out of the carriage. He finds Levavasseur, who's looking over his beloved monoplane by lantern-light. Levavasseur is furious at Latham's condition, but Latham, using Blériot's words, says to Léon, "The winds are dying down. If this continues, I should be up by 3:30 AM." Levavasseur assures him as much, and Latham goes off to bed.

568. 2:00 AM: A loud knock on the Blériot suite door. It's Henri and Collin, come to collect him. Blériot is noticeably grumpy. He fusses about, wants to remain in bed. "The weather is perfect. We must go. And you must eat something." Blériot does not want to eat. Collin threatens to spoon-feed him.

569. At the Blériot camp, Anzani is in his nightshirt, carrying a pistol. He goes round to parts of the camp, fires the revolver into the air to wake the crew. The reporters and also the small crowd nearby is thusly startled. The camp comes to life.

570. At the Antoinette outpost, a lone guard hears the gunfire. He grabs binoculars, sees activity in the Blériot camp. He ponders what to do, over a large yawn. He looks again, then decides to stay where he is, and settles for a little nap.

571. 2:30 AM. Blériot takes breakfast with Alice and Collin. They eat quickly. Blériot says he does not want to go. Collin insists he must, Alice does as well. Blériot knows this, and eats his meal defiantly, like a child.

572. Blériot remembers they must hurry first to the dock, to put Alice on the destroyer. Collin is stunned. "What destroyer?" Blériot smiles.

573. At the Calais dock, Blériot's Panhard pulls up. In the channel sits the majesty of the French destroyer Escopette. A crew boat is already here and waiting for Alice.

574. Collin is in a state of complete disbelief. Blériot looks dignified, says, "Blériot is not without friends, dear Collin." Blériot takes Alice to the boat. They exchange a final moment. She kisses him, has tears in her eyes as she waves goodbye.

575. 3:00 AM. Anzani is now clothed normally, save for his nightcap. He barks orders, pauses occasionally to drink from a flask. Blériot arrives, hobbles from the car on crutches. His face gathers energy. Spectators stir in the dark.

576. Blériot sees something. In the tree before him, almost invisible save for the lantern light, sits the once-injured hawk. It watches Blériot keenly, then jumps from its branch and into the gloom. It is gone.

577. Blériot comes to life. He takes command of the situation from Anzani, tells his men what to do. First, they must warm the engine. Anzani and Collin volunteer. They crank the three-cylinder motor, and it chugs ungracefully to life. As it spins, a small dog runs frightened from beside the XI, moving directly into the spinning propeller. A horrible shriek, and the dog is killed. Anzani cuts the ignition. The bystanders are aghast. Someone yells, "Bad luck!"

578. The Antoinette guard scans the Blériot camp with binoculars. He frowns, gets up and moves to report it.

579. Blériot demands someone remove what's left of the dog. The XI is examined for damage. Blériot has been seriously effected by the dog's death. Someone in the dark yells, "Bad omen! He should not fly!" Anzani shouts back, "Peasant!" He insists the great Blériot fly this day: "I must have payment for my engines, señor!" Anzani winks at Blériot. Blériot says, "Help me," and Anzani does that, assisting Blériot into the cockpit of the XI, as the crutches are strapped against it by Collin.

580. 4:00 AM. Dawn coming. Levavasseur is sound asleep in his work clothes, sitting on a chair in his quarters. In the distance we hear the Anzani popping to life. The Antoinette guard repeatedly beats on Levavasseur's door, but Léon remains asleep.

581. At the Blériot camp, the XI warms up. Blériot is tense, worried. Collin yells to him, "We are going, monsieur?" Blériot nods weakly. Anzani runs his hands down the wings of the XI. He seems pleased. Blériot is not convinced.

582. At the Antoinette camp, the frustrated guard opens the door to the sleeping Léon. He wakes the man, is cursed vehemently for doing so. The guard explains that Monsieur Blériot seems to be up to something. Léon bolts upright, runs outside. He grabs the guard's binoculars. In the pre-dawn, he sees Blériot getting ready for take off. "Merde."

583. With a smile on his lips, Latham sleeps the sleep of angels. Until Levavasseur bursts into his quarters, shouting like a maniac. Léon continues this ritual round the camp.

584. 4:40 AM. Blériot puts his goggles on, makes a final check. Collin looks toward the Calais port. Across the sky can now be seen a streak of black smoke from the Escopette. Collin sees the harbor flag rise to signal dawn, the legal time for departure. He signals as much to Blériot.

585. Blériot is about to go. He hesitates, stands in the cockpit, yells at Collin, "Which way is Dover?"

586. The ground crew thinks he's joking. No. Collin points directly toward Dover, which of course cannot be seen. Blériot salutes. Anzani suddenly rushes up: "Do not forget! Pump the oil every two minutes! Every two minutes!" Blériot nods. He breathes deeply, gives the signal for takeoff, starts to roll forward.

587. In the Antoinette camp, people run crazily to get the monoplane prepared for flight. Latham is extremely angry with Léon for not waking him. Léon tells him it's not his fault, but Latham's. On that, Léon looks with his binoculars toward the Blériot camp, and his first sight is that of P'tit Louis looking at *him* through binoculars! Léon curses, moves his glasses left and see Blériot bumping toward the cliffs. Léon slowly drops the binoculars, looks like he might die.

588. Blériot lifts from Les Baraques, easily taking to the skies and clearing the telegraph wires. He moves quickly toward the channel. The smoke from the Escopette is a welcome beacon. Blériot makes some adjustments, continues to climb.

589. At the Blériot camp, everyone goes wild. They rush to their cars, speeding toward Calais wire office to await word.

578. On the dawn cliffs of Dover, Fontaine carries the contents of his three meter tube, which we now see is a large tricolour French flag! Fontaine unfurls the large flag on the slightly diagonal slope of a sea-facing cliff. Winds blow the flag majestically against the sunrise, but no one's there to see: Fontaine is alone.

590. On the Escopette, Alice sees Blériot flying over, as do the rest of the crew. Shouts and cheers follow. Blériot is perhaps 200' from the sea, moving solid. Alice gently waves.

591. In the XI, Blériot fusses with his foot. He's heading toward the great black streak of the Escopette's smoke trail. He hears shouts. He looks over the side, sees the Escopette. A horn sounds. Blériot waves, disappears into the smoke. When on the other side, he wipes his face, continues the journey.

592. The Captain of the Escopette, name of Kamiński, watches Blériot in a telescope. He tells Alice that he did not expect the Monsieur to be flying so quickly: They must now move much faster to keep within rescue distance.

593. At the Antoinette camp, people are leaving for Calais to await word on Blériot. Winds have started as well. Latham and Léon argue about the flight. Latham is ready. A bystander comments they will never get off the ground in this wind.

594. At the telegraph office, Mamet and Collin ask for word on the Dover side: Windy, a bit cloudy. But not too bad. Collin looks worried. "Wind is not good. Not good."

595. Blériot, over the channel. An exquisite sight of clear skies and completely perfect flying. Blériot wipes the oil from his face and goggles, observes that he is approaching a misty, cloudy area. He looks around and over, trying to get his bearings. But the channel is featureless, and no ships are sailing. He continues.

596. British policemen approach Fontaine on the cliffs of Dover. They ask why he is here, and why a French tricolour? Fontaine says he is awaiting a monoplane flown by Louis Blériot. The officers look at one another. "Sorry, a what?"

597. Latham in the Antoinette, prepping for takeoff. Winds have kicked-up quite dramatically and clouds move in. Levasseur surveys this change of weather, makes a "cut" motion with his hand over his throat. Latham ignores this, shakes his head, gives the thumbs up. Léon again insists "cut". Latham ignores. Léon, enraged, climbs up to the cockpit and curses Latham. The winds have won. Levasseur will not risk his monoplane in the bad weather. It is done! Latham cuts the engine, his eyes red with anger and hurt.

598. At the wireless, Collin awaits. Crowds have gathered inside and out. Communication from Dover: Winds increasing, visibility failing. Collin shakes his head, Anzani goes on a tirade against God...but catches himself, apologizing with Hail Marys.

599. Blériot, above the channel. All is well. He pumps the oil, wipes his face and goggles. Scanning the water and clouds, he sees, faintly, a white streak far ahead of him. His eyes go wide. He smiles and laughs to himself. The English coast!

600. At that second, a huge gust blows him almost sideways. He quickly grasps the controls, but the XI is rolling over, its wings losing their attack. The engine sounds like it may stall. Quickly thinking, Blériot goes into a dive. The engine regains power, but he's now heading toward the water! He calmly but painfully tries to level. He is going to crash.

601. But then Blériot, wincing in pain from his foot, gets the XI leveled out! Now he is flying directly above the churning channel, his wheels missing the water by mere centimeters. Blériot gently but assuredly gets the plane to rise, and away he goes into the sky. Higher, higher, higher...but he is now quite lost and disoriented. He cannot see the coast through the clouds and mist, and can barely see the waters below him. He has no idea where he's going.

602. Latham and Levavasseur arrive outside the wireless, where Collin and the others tensely await word. Latham and Levavasseur enter to sour stares. But then Collin smiles wickedly at Léon, who turns and walks out.

603. The British destroyer Sumner cruises near the English Coast, north of Dover. A crewman on duty hears Blériot's engine, does not know what to make of it. And then, he sees the XI appear briefly in a space between clouds above. He runs to tell his captain.

604. Blériot has also seen the destroyer, is duly confused. There is indecision on his face: Should he turn around?

605. Word comes at the Marconi installation: Blériot heard passing over destroyer Sumner, proceeding off course toward the North Sea.

606. Anzani curses in Italian, bangs on the desk. Collin shakes his head, stands up and looks ready to leave. "Blériot is lost at sea."

607. Blériot gets worried. He pumps oil, wipes his face. He scans, looks below him for some sign. He drops his elevation a bit, but visibility isn't much better and the wind is troublesome. But then he sees something: Three small ships in formation heading to the left, away from him. He drops down farther, to the point where he can clearly see detail.

608. Onboard the ships, the crews have gotten sight of Blériot's approach. They are at first frightened, and then wildly excited. They are all British, these men.

609. Blériot flies over and past them, waving. He yells for directions to Dover. But they cannot hear him.

610. Blériot's luck changes. He sees, emerging through the mists, the white cliffs of Dover. His eyes go wide. He raises the plane's elevation, but visibility is a big problem.

611. A gust again hits him, giving great trouble turning the plane fully toward land. Blériot leans on the foot pedal, feels incredible pain. Looking down, he sees a large patch of blood spreading on his bandages. Blériot's face becomes steely. He pumps his oil again, fights the plane to get it heading east.

612. On the cliffs near Dover Castle, Fontaine hears the Anzani chugging. He looks around frantically, tries to spot Blériot. People are gathering now, British folk and competing papermen. But Fontaine is still basically alone and isolated.

613. And there is Blériot, northwest, over the sea. Fontaine goes wild, starts waving the tricolour and yelling loudly.

614. Blériot can barely see, wipes his goggles. The cliffs of Dover are now beautifully visible. But Blériot is too low. He fights with the wind, rapidly approaching land. He catches a lifting gust, and up he goes. Now he's too high. He levels, then sees Fontaine waving the spectacular tricolour.

615. On the Escopette, which is steaming toward Dover, Captain Kamiński gets a whispered announcement from his first officer. He looks over at Alice, who knows it's bad news. Kamiński walks to her, clears his throat. "Madame?" Alice puts her hand up for silence. "I do not believe it." She raises binoculars to her eyes, scans the horizon for her love. Kamiński shrugs, walks away.

616. Far from failure, Blériot cruises directly for Fontaine. But he's canting side to side wildly, barely able to keep the plane from flipping. His foot has bled more. He's in agony.

617. Before he knows what he's done, he's over the cliffs. The sea disappears from beneath him. Fontaine is ahead and below. Blériot must land. He tries and tries, but the wind refuses to allow it. So, Blériot kills the engine.

618. The plane drops like an arrow. Blériot wrestles, his foot driving him mad.

619. The landing looks fatal this time, happening at great speed. Blériot puts the nose up, the plane loses momentum, rolls to its side. Blériot corrects, then overcorrects.

620. The XI falls like a stone, zooming directly over Fontaine's head. It hits the sloped ground at an angle, skids. Landing gear disintegrates. The plane maintains its composure, then abruptly stops cold, saved from annihilation by the natural grade of English terrain.

621. Fontaine runs over, plants the tricolour in the ground, helps extract Blériot painfully from the cockpit. He prepares Blériot's crutches, people dash forward from the background. When Blériot stands, Fontaine kisses him enthusiastically on both cheeks. "Marvelous, Blériot! Bravo!" Blériot, his face black from Anzani's oil, smiles very slightly. "It is done," he says. After a pause he asks, "Latham?" Fontaine smiles brilliantly. "Still in Calais." Blériot only nods.

622. A cheering throng descends upon them. From the craze comes a British Customs Officer. The officer asks if Blériot has anything to claim, and also wants Blériot's papers. Blériot does not understand. The crowd laughs.

623. At the Calais Marconi, the crowd once joyous is now solemn. People mill about, talk in restrained tones. Except for Léon and Latham, who laugh with a Daily Mail reporter. The Marconi operator, an old man, emerges from the building. Everyone turns. The old man holds a paper. People call for quiet. The old man announces Blériot's arrival in Dover, and safe landing. The crowd goes absolutely insane. A pure frenzy of joy and screams. Except for Léon and Latham. Latham walks away to Léon's car, puts himself inside.

624. NEWSPAPER HEADLINES (montage): Mentions of Blériot's amazing success, from around the world. A quote from Latham: "Cordial congratulations. Hope to follow you soon."

625. A week later, at the Blériot house: All is calm and quiet. Blériot preps to travel, as does Alice. In their finest clothes! Kids are running around, they too dressed sharply. Blériot puts his topcoat on a hangar. Anzani and Collin and all the rest are here, but not dressed for an occasion. They simply wish Blériot the best on his meeting with the president of France.

626. In the Panhard, the whole Blériot gang. Exquisite day. Alice reminds Blériot about a telegram he received, from Nadar. Blériot is stunned. He reads it: "Deep gratitude for the joy with which your triumph fills this antediluvian of the heavier than air machine. Regards. Nadar." Blériot beams.

627. They approach Paris. Great gatherings of people are afoot, and everyone in the car wonders what's going on. Farther they go, to waves and cheers. A shower of rainbow confetti and ticker-tapes greet them. Finally they realize the titan crowd is for Blériot! Probably 200,000 Parisians are here, maybe more. Banners of "Vive Blériot!" and just "Blériot!" all around. The roar is deafening. Blériot sheds a tear, grabs Alice's hand.

Fin.